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The Bride of Mission San José

A Tale of Early California

By

JOHN AUGUSTINE CULL

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CHARACTERS PROMINENT IN THE STORY

SEÑOR MENDOZA, former Colonel in Napoleonic wars; subsequently, Administrator of Mission San José de Guadalupe, Santa Clara Valley, California; later Governor of the province.

CARMELITA MENDOZA, daughter of Señor Mendoza.

PADRE LUSCIANO OSUNA, Spiritual Head of Mission San José de Guadalupe.

CAPTAIN MORANDO, Comandante of the Pueblo of San José; afterward General of all the land forces of the department of California.

COLONEL BARCELO, Comandante of the Presidio of Monterey, and acting Governor of California.

CHARLES O'DONNELL, in the secret service of the United States.

SEÑORA VALENTINO, in the secret service of England.

CAPTAIN FARQUHARSON, English representative extraordinary in the province.

COMMODORE BILLINGS, Commanding the American fleet in the Pacific.

ADMIRAL FAIRBANKS, Commanding the British fleet in the Pacific.

YOSCOLO, Famous Indian chief.

STANISLAUS, Lieutenant of Yoscolo.

BROWN, Factotum of Captain Farquharson; later, in the employ of Señor Mendoza.

Time: 1842 to 1846.

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CHAPTER I

A SERENADE IN THE MOONLIGHT

"FAIRER art thou than the lily, than the rose more sweet," sang a mellow baritone voice. A guitar thrummed accompaniment. At the end of his improvisation the singer waved the instrument gracefully, now in sweeping stroke, again in shorter measure, as if he were a maestro directing his musicians. Then he touched the strings in melancholy strain:

"Beat, beat, little dove, thy tender wings against thy iron cage."

Next triumphantly he intoned:

"Fly away, little dove, fly away; the cruel bars are broken."

Once more in pantomime he directed his fancied musicians.

"What is it, Don Alfredo? Art fanning thyself, or do mosquitoes annoy thee?"

He looked upward into a pair of dark, laughing eyes not three feet distant.

"O, Doña Carmelita," rapturously, "I was marking rhythm for the angel choirs which sing in praise of thy beauty and charm. They sing of one angel, even thou, Doña mia, more fair than they."

The girl withdrew from the embrasure, brushing her fan across its iron-barred front.

"I shut out, Don Alfredo, thy foolish words. I drive them back into the air. I fear the angels are displeased at thy presumption. Many nights have you sung here meaningless words, empty nothings; but even better such than to speak thoughts which must offend the saints in heaven."

"O, Doña Carmelita, let me once again see thy eyes sparkle in the moonlight; add a flash or two from thy teeth of pearl——"

"Hush, Don Alfredo, or I leave. Perhaps at other embrasures not far away wait caballeros, not so vain as to fancy themselves directors of the music celestial. Good night, Don Alfredo. Clip the wings of thy imagination lest thou fly too near the sun."

"O, Doña mia, do not go away. If it please thee I'll praise the heavenly angels.

The window was suddenly closed.

"Caramba! again. It's difficult for a soldier to trim his tongue that he may speak words of love to the tender ears of the capricious señorita."

"Good evening, Captain Morando."

The soldier turned abruptly. At his side stood Señor Mendoza, administrator of the Mission of San José, gravely looking at him.

"Good evening, your Excellency. I hope your health is all of the best," somewhat discomposedly.

"Many thanks, Captain. Your hope is generously fulfilled in me, for my health is indeed good."

The Administrator's expression became quizzical. "May I ask you, brave soldier, why you stand on guard here in the moonlight, bearing that singular-appearing

firearm?" pointing to the guitar. "Can it be that renegade Indians threaten?"

"When a soldier stands at guard, Señor Administrator, may there not be motives many, other than renegade Indians?"

The other laughed and changed the subject. "Did I but dream the comandante of the pueblo of San José was to be here to-night, he would have been invited to sit with our council meeting but now concluded. Spring advances, and the rains fall not. Never has Alta California seen such drought. Our live stock sadly need grazing and water. Hence I called the council. I would that you had been present. The military mind is fertile in expedient."

"I fear it would be sadly deficient in surmounting the need of a south wind."

"Our Captain has wit, as well as vigilance. But I am forgetting hospitality, soldier protector of the Mission. Come within. Let others woo, if they will, the goddess of dreams, but for you and me the pleasures of fellowship will hasten lagging hours."

"I thank you, Señor Mendoza, but I fear——"

"Fear never a moment, friend Morando. Sentinels watch over us in valley and on hill, men trusty, tried, and true. Eyes have they as keen as eagles; the ears and the swiftness of the fox are theirs. Therefore no vigil need thou keep for us."

Morando still hesitated.

"Come now. Right glad am I that you are here. Within, a glass of wine, a chat, perhaps a harmless game at cards, await us. Soon roll the hours away. Then

you gallop across the pastures, alas! dry and bare now, to the pueblo of San José. I seek my couch soothed by your young companionship. Now, what wilt thou?"

An inarticulate sound behind the embrasure. Don Alfredo could have sworn it concealed a silvery laugh from the fair Doña Carmelita.

"The night birds are calling, Don Alfredo. Did you not just hear them?" looking slyly at the captain. "They are sleepy and we arouse them."

Holding his arm and talking the while about the drought and other difficulties the Administrator led Don Alfredo within.

"Brave Captain, place that death-dealing weapon on the chair," pointing a second time to the guitar. "Some new invention, of course, though I seem to see something familiar about it. Seat yourself on that settee. It came to me from Madrid."

"Thank you, señor."

With a smile as gracious as the moonlight the señor said: "At another time I would ask my daughter, the Doña Carmelita, to join us for a little visit, but the child is young and the night already late. She would doubtless wish to sleep."

They were in the Administrator's private sitting room, the duplicate of a room in his father's castle in Spain. Priceless Persian rugs were on the floor, with high-back chairs of solid mahogany everywhere about. A massive secretary, likewise of mahogany, stood at one side. Tapestries designed in Seville hung on one of the walls; weapons of the hunt and of war, another; while oil paintings of battles, in many of which the family

Mendoza had been distinguished, completed the adornment.

"Caramba! I ride miles to serenade the daughter; and here I am in the hacienda house, the guest of the father, while the señorita is somewhere in the courtyard, laughing, I'm sure—yes, laughing," thought the young soldier.

"Some wine, my Captain? Genuine Malaga it is, guaranteed by government stamp, not the juice of the old Mission grape, excellent as that is. Now, the cigarros. Let us speak, Señor Captain, of the General Guerrero. I understand he was once commander of that division in Spain from which you have so lately come. Am I correct?"

"You are, señor. The General was my commander so recently that one year will more than bridge the time."

"Guerrero was my captain when, as a subaltern, I sailed these western seas, and saw service in the Philippines—service that was service. Tell me of my one-time leader. Is he well?"

"He is well, and the years have small meaning to his strength."

Captain Morando talked with his host of the campaigns of General Guerrero in the Spanish trans-Mediterranean dependencies; of the newly concluded peace there; and of the retirement of the General by the age limit, but all the while his mind was fashioning love songs outside the window of the fair señorita. Through the haze of tobacco smoke the strong, kindly face of the Administrator of Mission San José de Guadalupe softened into the sweet face of the doña, with her laugh-

ing eyes and beautiful hair; his deep voice gave way to the lighter tones of the daughter.

"Peace in North Africa brought relief to the young soldier from discomforts of the campaign. Was it not so?"

"Señor Mendoza, it brought the weariness of camp and garrison. The morning drill, the after-luncheon parade, the society function in the evening, ill filled my idea of the life a man should live. Besides, the ambitious soldier sees advancement only in a life of action. I sought a change and I found one. My resignation was easily effected. I then carried my letters to the Mexican war secretary, whom I made acquainted with my preference. Accordingly, came my assignment to San José pueblo."

"Good! Good, my Captain! During my visit in Mexico just concluded I learned that you had been appointed comandante. Some wine in your glass?"

"No more, thank you."

"What, not any? The young man is abstemious. That is well. Strong and lusty age follows youth lived along the way of moderation."

The men puffed their cigars. Higher and higher, in widening circles, rose the incense of the fragrant leaf. The Administrator was busy with his thoughts; likewise the guest. "His daughter, he intimates, is too young for late hours. Many a night, at low twelve, during his sojourn in Mexico, have I sung to her from my corner in the courtyard. What would he say if he knew that to-night is not my first visit thither—nor yet my second—nor my third—nor yet——"

The older man broke the silence. "Soldier, our California needs men."

Morando started slightly, then signified by a movement of the head that he had heard. Mendoza exhaled several whiffs of his Havana before speaking further, meanwhile surveying the alert form and soldierly features of the Captain.

"Life is not all play, as many appear to think it is. Our province has passed the years of childhood. With maturity comes duty as waking with day."

The soldier listened with interest.

"I believe the cleavage of California and Mexico is near at hand. They fall apart by their own weight. Even the Mexican secretary of state spoke openly of this to me a month ago."

"Then what comes, Señor Mendoza?"

"There comes that which we ourselves make. On an ethical foundation of the highest order must we build our body politic. Then, when our province becomes free, some protecting nation will extend to us a sister's hand. If in this fruitful land there should prevail the spirit of sweet-do-nothingness, how can we hope that others will consider us highly while we deem ourselves lightly?"

"My time here has been too short to have studied these matters carefully. However, I have heard men speak of a California republic."

"The vision of dreamers, my Captain. We have neither army nor navy, nor can we hope to have them. How could we unaided hold this province situated as it is, the commercial center of these seas and the bosom of resources as yet scarcely touched?"

"Then, in your judgment, it should not be a question of absolute independence?"

"In one sense, no. Yet, I favor a rule by the people. People of enlightenment will govern wisely. Captain Morando, we need men, more men, who will place the common good above their private interest."

"You speak the duty of the soldier, Señor Mendoza."

"It is so, Captain." Then turning the conversation back to the situation in the Santa Clara valley: "Have you run across Stanislaus yet? No? Nor Yoscolo? Well, I hope you will soon see both over your pistol barrel. They are a menace to the peace in our valley. Yoscolo is the abler of the two. Many a lively skirmish have my fighting peons had with the scoundrel."

During this time the Doña Carmelita mounted a staircase and walked along a passage which had its way over a high, wide adobe wall leading from one part of the house to another. The moonlight fell in weird fantasy on the hacienda grounds. Palms, evergreens, flowers assumed moving shapes, as if engaged in low but animated conversation.

Breezes from San Francisco Bay flowed intermittently into the courtyard, shaking the branches and rattling the leaves. One stronger gust caught spray from a fountain and sent it eddying into the white night. The awakened birds murmured sleepily and myriad crickets chirped remonstrance. Three Spanish mastiffs, guardians of the inclosure, edged away from the impromptu shower, then looked up furtively at the girl, ashamed of temporary cowardice.

Anon there floated down to her from the heights be-

yond the call of the Indian sentinel as he made his rounds, "Love to God!" followed by the reply from one of his fellows, "Love to God!" With a dozen tongues the hills took up the refrain, "Love to God! Love to God!"

"What can my father and Captain Morando find to talk about so long! Men can gossip as well as women when they are so minded."

She mounted another flight of outside stairs that led to the top of the buildings which formed three sides of the courtyard. The courtyard door was open. Several peons were holding the struggling watchdog while another brought Morando's horse.

"Hold fast those dogs!" Señor Mendoza said to the Indians. "They are as fierce as tigers. Good-night, Captain Morando. Remember two weeks from Thursday evening, at six. My daughter's dueña will be home from Monterey, and we'll have both to dine with us, with perhaps a few friends, just a valecito casero—a little house party. Good-night. Glad you've some men in the village. The country won't be safe till we rid it of those miscreant renegades. Good-night, Captain."

The heavy door closed. The doña saw that Captain Morando rode around the courtyard to the embrasure window, halted and looked up anxiously. Walking to the edge of the roof she stood there, a beautiful picture. He waved his hand.

"O, doña mia—" he began. Unfastening a rose from her hair she tossed it to him. The pulsing air caught it, and swaying, whirling, it fell. He reined in his horse, urged it forward, swung it around, keeping in the un-

certain downward path of the rose, till finally its stem rested in his hand.

He kissed the flower again and again; then holding it up to her, waved it in rhythmic motion as he had done before with the guitar.

"O, doña mia—" he began once more, but the watch-dogs bayed savagely and rushed against the adobe fence. His horse shied and sprang away. He wheeled back again.

The señorita had disappeared.

CHAPTER II

THE LION AND THE LAMB LIE DOWN TOGETHER

MOST unwonted drought had laid a withering hand on fertile Santa Clara valley that year. March had come and no vast stretches of wild oats measured the way from foothill to bay: no juicy grazing for cattle and horses on the rich bottom lands. The plain-brown color-tone of autumn prevailed, not that of spring, in triumphant green and promise of rich harvest.

This interchange prevailed almost everywhere except around the gushing springs at the Mission San José. Here rioted nature in her proudest fancy, for the intense warmth of day and night had brought to blossom before their time wild plant, oleander, and fruit tree. Here was green grass in luxuriant abundance, while the tall mustard flaunted its yellow top as usual, and afforded a resting place for chattering blackbird and twittering linnet.

The springs on the Administrator's property several miles north of Mission San José had gradually diminished in flow until only unsightly, trampled mud remained where was a limpid lake in happier years.

The geyserlike warm springs on the property of Don Fulgencio Higuera, Señor Mendoza's neighbor to the

south, had suddenly run dry. In fact, not more than half a dozen sources of water-supply remained within a radius of a score of miles. The like had never been known, not even in the memory of the oldest Indian in the valley.

Weird relics of Druidic worship, half forgotten under the tutelage of the Mission padres, were revived in forest and mountain. Vast columns of smoke, odoriferous of cedar and bay-leaf, reached high toward heaven in the motionless air. The ancient name of Oroysom replaced on many a tongue that of the smoothly flowing Mission San José de Guadalupe, which name the missionaries had given the region when their work of Christianizing the Indians began.

"Oroysom, Oroysom, begs thee, Great Spirit, to awake," sang the aborigine. "Let the perfume of laurel propitiate thee. Let the sweetness of the smoke of cedar be a gracious offering unto thee. On the fields of Oroysom no food for beast is found. Gaunt famine is rushing hither in wind-swift pace. Our hunters search stream and wildwood, but find no food for the child, the women, the old people. There is no maize, no field of growing wheat; and, lo! the garden is dry and empty. Oroysom calls on thee, Father of the rain, Source of the springs, and Giver of the harvest, to arouse from slumber and forget no longer the people who from old have honored thee."

Around the great fires at night the Indians swung hand in hand, swaying in willowy motion as they chanted their incantation. Their shadows danced in wildest abandon on the mammoth rocks or mountain

peaks which formed the background of the strange scene.

Señor Mendoza, the leading spirit among the landholders on the eastern side of the valley, endeavored, as, indeed, did his neighbors, to maintain equanimity, but there was much anxiety among all.

Even water for family use had to be carried on horseback, the vaqueros from ranchos miles away coming to the few remaining water-supplies, and riding back with the precious water skins over the pommel of the saddle.

It was the last week of January when the Administrator first called his fellow landowners together to consider what could be done. They gathered in his sitting room. Graybeards they were, the most of them, and rich in the wisdom of many years, as well as in landed possessions.

Long they smoked the cigarros of the provident Administrator and sipped his rare wines, the while exchanging polite remarks on the nothings of the day. This was their way while waiting to begin attack on some weighty subject. Finally Señor Mendoza ordered the serving peons to bring on his choicest cognac, a select French product.

"The Administrator is vastly disturbed over this rainless winter," whispered Don Pedro Zelaya, of the rancho San Lorenzo, to Don Fulgencio Higuera, of the rancho Aguas Calientes. "Paris knows no better cognac than I see here. I divine his anxiety by the quality of his liquors. Last year when renegade Indians threatened he furnished our meeting here with a Portuguese

cordial mild as milk. Much as he fears the prowling Yoscolo and Stanislaus, he measures them not high in comparison with this drought."

The leonine-appearing Señor Higuera squared his yard-wide shoulders to attention as he sat in his high-backed chair. His eye ran slowly over the slender and dapper Señor Zelaya. A trace of humor stole into his eyes, then over his bearded face. "Brandy in the head seldom lends swiftness to the feet. Is it not so?"

Pedro Zelaya was the swiftest foot-racer in the province of California. He was also a lover of good eating and drinking. When training for his famous races he must forego the delicacies of his French cook, and the bouquet of imported wine, which deprivations he relished not over well.

"A thimbleful of brandy is given even to a bull-fighter before the contest," replied Señor Zelaya, bowing politely and suavely smiling.

Years before the doughty Señor Higuera had seized and held by the horns an infuriated bull which, maddened by eating the dreaded rattleweed, a venomous plant then common, had left the herd and rushed up on Higuera, who was standing, with his wife and children, in the open before the courtyard of his hacienda house.

The peons served the cognac in long, slender-stemmed goblets. Señor Mendoza raised his glass, looked for a moment at the amber liquid, then sipped it gently. Lowering the glass he glanced around at the assembled company. Each man, following the example of the host, tasted the contents of his own glass, and then allowed his eyes to rest on the Señor Administrator.

This process was repeated once, twice, three times, until each had finished his beverage.

Señor Mendoza's aquiline features, garnished by mustache and imperial, and embellished by a waving iron-gray hair, fell into severer mold.

"Señors, my friends, may I have your attention?"

No one spoke.

"Señors," his tones serious and resonant, "it is not raining to-day."

His assertion was not disputed. The rays of the sun streamed into the room. It was afternoon and the delicately tinted stained glass of the windows was resplendent in the light.

"It rained not yesterday, nor in the yesterday of many months," looking from one to another of his company, as if in search of opposition.

The señors, in solemn concord, bowed in corroboration of his statement.

"The soft south wind blows not. Overhead is the summer sun. I see no hope of rain to-morrow."

The grave señors acquiesced.

"Indians in thousands, beasts in tens of thousands, are on our lands. Responsibilities, neither few nor doubtful, weigh on our shoulders. If it rains not to-morrow, nor yet till the to-morrows touch late spring, how can we fulfill the duty this province of Alta California lays at our door, that our aborigine wards lack not the sustenance their condition demands?"

His look went from face to face. Suddenly he stood upright.

"Señors, to save our people we must save our cattle.

Even if the rain comes, the feed will be late. Therefore our herds must go elsewhere soon, or only their dried bones will see another year. Whither shall we take them?"

The foremost in the council gave their views.

"The river to the north, called Russian, nourishes vast cañons of redwood forest. The soil is ever moist where the heaven-searching redwood grows. Let rafts be made to ferry the animals to the shore of Contra Costa. In another year they will return, with increase, fat and safe. Our peons throughout the year can call hither from that region the supplies we need." Thus Don Antonio Peralta.

As he concluded the other leaders bowed to him solemnly.

The dapper Zelaya indicated to his host, who was yet standing, his wish to speak.

The quiet humor in the heart of Señor Higuera stole again into his eyes and over his face and reached his tongue. "Swiftness in the feet means quickness in the mind directing those feet. Let us hear Señor Zelaya."

The lord of the rancho San Lorenzo looked musingly at his friend. "I doubt greatly that even Señor Higuera could hold a grizzly bear by the horns, since that creature possesses none. At any rate, the grizzly has strength yet greater than our mighty Higuera here. The deep shadows of the Russian river cañons shelter these enemies in numbers. Our vaqueros could little protect their charges in those glades and thickets. Señors," impressively, "if our live stock are to leave

their bones bleaching anywhere this season, why send them abroad to seek this privilege?"

"Brava!" said the giant Higuera, smiling approval.

Some one then spoke of the pasturage away to the south, in the valley of the Salinas, or even the rolling lands of Santa Barbara. But the feed could but poorly support the herds already there, so one said who recently had traveled about.

Mendoza resumed his seat, since no one spoke further. For a moment he silently regarded his neighbors. At last: "Friends and brothers mine, Señor Peralta has spoken of the north country as a possible solution for our imminent difficulties. Señor Zelaya is right. The Russian bear, as well as the California grizzly, would divide our property by piecemeal there. There are yet the river beds of the Sacramento and the San Joaquin."

"But Yoscolo and Stanislaus and their thousand renegades!" objected one. "We go to the mouth of the tiger. More than ever are these men active now."

"Our fighting peons equal in strength their recreant fellows. Nothing remains but for us to cross the passes to the soft bottom lands in the eastern valleys. Señors, shall we go?"

The Administrator's judgment was accepted, and the visitors, standing, drank another glass of brandy and departed.

Early the next day began a great exodus of cattle and horses through mountain defile, north and south, to the flat lowlands across the mountain ranges, Indian vaqueros, peons armed with bows and arrows, and here

and there a Spaniard with a flint-lock musket going with the herds.

Despite the general departure of live stock the late spring saw wondrous commotion about the watering troughs of Señor Mendoza. Cattle from the hills, from the marshes of the bay, from no one knew where, scented water and rushed in thirst-madness to the Mission of San José; bellowing, leaping, rolling over and over in their frenzy to reach the water!

All day long did the vaqueros rush into the surging tumult, springing with the swiftness of the cat from back to back of cattle or horse in the plunging mass, separating the press here to save the weaker animals from suffocation, opening lanes there to allow ingress to the troughs. Bellowing of cattle mingled with neighing of horses in wildest confusion. Famine showed feverlike in their eyes and echoed madly in their cries. During the day the battle raged, but at night they drew away to the hills looking for the lower tree-foliage and the scanty leaf-forage.

Then came other animals to the water. Thirst drew them from the mountains and drove away their fear of man. The gaunt bear lapped from the trough, and though the bow of the hunter was bent and the arrow aimed to slay, pity withheld the arrow.

The timid deer stood unafraid at the side of its ancient enemies, man and bear. The scream of the mountain lion mingled with the howl of the wolf, as they ran about among men, looking for food after they had quenched their thirst at the watering place.

Some strange chivalry, deep residing in the beasts of

prey, held the weaker denizens of the wildwood in safety from claw and fang. In their dire adversity came a literal fulfillment of the old prophecy that the lion and the lamb should lie down together.

Señor Mendoza and his friends faced bravely the difficult situation.

"Our Indian brother shows now his likeness of spirit to the four-footed dwellers of the wood. Famine madness possesses both. Together do they roam by day and weirdly cry by night," said Mendoza in the council of his neighbors.

"The Indians lack not food or water," said some one. "What need of such strange actions?"

"The savage is close to the surface in every nature," replied Mendoza. "Among our Indian friends the outcropping is more easily apparent."

Several began speaking at the same time, an unusual thing in that placid assembly. Like a murmur it began, but rose to distinct word and ordered expression. "Our wives, our children, our lives, are in danger from these mad wards the province has given us."

"Our soldiers are at the pueblo," said one.

"They number less than fifty. The Indians have strength and to spare to drive our few troopers into the San Francisco bay," said Zelaya.

"Why were so many aborigines trained in the use of the musket and lance?" from some one else.

"They have fought our battles against their untamed brethren for a generation," replied Mendoza.

As usual this meeting was in Mendoza's house. Directly across the road was the Mission church.

As if to give emphasis to the fears but just expressed from everywhere there came the peculiar semitone that only moccasined feet can make. A thousand footfalls centered their way to the old adobe church. The Indians poured through the open doors into the auditorium until it overflowed. Like restless ants those who could not get within ran around the building, filling every approach, surging in resistless multitude, as did the thirst-driven cattle around the water source.

"They have gone entirely mad! First they will destroy the church, then fall on our families and on us," came somewhere from the elders. "Let us fly to our hacienda houses, barricade our gates, and fight to the end."

"Let us wait," suggested Mendoza, "and see further."

With sudden impulse the aborigines began to move from side to side in singular unison. At first they uttered no sound, then came a crooning of strange medleys in lifeless, indistinct tones.

"They commence thus their war dance!"

Señor Mendoza shrugged.

A tall Indian mounted the church steps. He turned. His face was wrinkled, his long hair, white, yet straight and sturdy he stood before the undulating throng.

"'Tis old Juan Antonio, major-domo of the Mission there. When did he come from the region of the San Joaquin? He and the padre drove thither their cattle even before we sent away ours."

The man waved his hand over the people. The tumult

was lessened. From the church came the soft chords of the organ. A powerful voice intoned.

"My soul hath magnified the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour."

The organ swelled in thunder notes, as the faithful within the church took up the antistrophe:

"For behold he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid, and from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Thus was sung the Magnificat.

A man came out to the church door. Youth was on face and figure, but care and illness lined his features and bowed the shoulders that showed broad even under his friar's robe. In movements as graceful as a feather's dip he pointed to the Indians, then to their homes scattered over valley and hill. In another gesture he motioned to the neophytes to be on their way. They looked stolidly at one another, then back to the padre who remained standing with his arm outstretched. Savagery flamed anew in their faces. With the growl of an angry beast about to rend its prey they rushed up the steps. The friar, motionless, still stood before them, still pointing to their houses. The mob charged on. They were but a pace distant when, as one man, they paused, held in check by the unswerving calm of the churchman. Back from him, step by step, they went till the ground was reached. Again they paused and looked up at the friar, indecision written on their faces. The padre did not move. With a single impulse they turned homeward and silently filed along the road, in obedience to Padre Osuna's unspoken command. Soon

the friar and Juan Antonio were alone. They walked down to a courtyard gate not unlike Señor Mendoza's, and disappeared within.

Mendoza and his friends had witnessed the drama to its close.

A rumbling sounded in the distance which soon resolved itself into the measured tramp of horses, so many that their coming shook the ground. The riders, in uniform, with lance in hand and carbine slung over shoulder, pushed their mounts foaming at mouth and flank to the courtyard gate.

"The cavalry from San José!" cried Mendoza. "What brings them in such haste?"

An officer sprang from his horse.

The Administrator opened his window. "Captain Morando!"

The Captain saluted.

"Why this force, Señor Captain?"

"Message was hurried to me that your Indians, frenzied by pagan rites, were about to make an attack. I gathered my men, together with such volunteers as the pueblo afforded, and hot-foot came to the rescue. I see, instead, the Indians going quietly to their homes. What does it mean?"

"Come within, Señor Captain."

In a moment Morando stood with the others.

The señor told him of the coming of the padre and his dispersal of the Indians.

Señorita Carmelita entered the room, bowing to her father, then to the others.

"O, papacito, my Indian maids who ran away last

week, in their madness, are back all sane and cool. They ask your forgiveness and a new lease of service."

"You alone have to do with them, my child."

The Captain was standing at attention. Red lightly tinged the girl's cheek as she saw him. She again bowed, and went out, with "I thank you, papacito."

The Indian maidens were heard on the outside loudly wailing their thanks to the señorita, as was the way of children of the wild when penitent.

"Señors, we need——"

"Rain," interrupted the quiet Higuera.

"Señors," continued Zelaya, taking no notice of the interruption, "we need thank the reverend padre for his work this day. Besides, he is ill, and even an enemy who is ill is entitled to our consideration and sympathy. I do not mean he is our enemy," he quickly added.

"I shall do myself the honor of calling upon him," came from Mendoza. "As Administrator of this Mission and its lands I am interested in everyone in the Mission, including its spiritual head. Some jesuit bark I chance to have will not come amiss in this fever of the river bottoms. I fancy but little remains in the province."

The company departed, the soldiery to the San José pueblo, the land barons to their hacienda houses.

The hundreds of white adobe cots which swarmed around each grandee's mansion, as well as around the Mission buildings, sheltered that evening the retainer occupants who for days had forgotten service to their feudal lords and the ways civilization had taught them. Once more hill and valley were dotted with the blaze of camp fires before the Indian doorposts.

CHAPTER III

A DIP INTO THE PAST

THE family Mendoza had deserved well of the Spanish crown. Stanch supporters of the kingdom had they ever been. Their talents, their wealth, their lives they held only as in trust to be devoted, whenever came the call, to the higher, the nobler good.

Adventurous too were the citizens of that name. With Pizarro they overthrew the Incas of Peru. With Hernando Cortez they stormed the place of strength of the Montezumas. Their swords flashed north and south in the conquering of vast empires. Few of them returned from these scenes of glory, and of those few the greater part were maimed and broken men. The native arrow or the fever swamp claimed life or health of the valiant conquisador, not excepting the famous Mendozas.

Thus sifted in the sieve of centuries, the family Mendoza fell gradually in numbers from men sufficient to fill half a regiment, as in the old crusader times, to but two representatives, of whom the younger was Jesus Maria y José.

By law of entail the elder brother received the land and fortunes of that once powerful family. A lieu-

tenantship in the army was the portion of the young Jesus Maria y José, a slender consolation, it might seem, but the bold-spirited youth accepted it with gracious willingness.

His eighteenth year found him embarking on a transport bound for the dangerous service of the Philippines, with a soldiery gathered from the Spanish prisons. To quell and govern such men was a pleasing experience to the Castilian boy; not that the task was an easy one, or that he would have it so.

In the becalmed waters of the tropics the sterling metal of the youthful officer first showed itself. Here the mutinous intent of the men, long smoldering under restraint of discipline, resolved into action.

Early one morning the alarm bell rang loud of danger. The officers hurried on deck to find nearly every soldier under arms and calling aloud for vengeance on the oppressors, as they called their superiors. The leader was a huge, bull-necked cutthroat who once had been a bandit in the Pyrenees.

"Each mincing ladies' man among you shall walk the plank, before the guns of my brave fellows here, and we'll cheer you pretty, scented gentlemen as you battle in the water with the sharks," shouted the jeering leader.

Shouts of applause came from the men, mingled with jibes and curses.

Mendoza asked of his captain that he be allowed to speak with the chief mutineer. He stated briefly his purpose. Permission was given, for the situation was desperate.

The officers, but a score, faced full five hundred men, all armed. Even the artillery of the regiment, shotted to the mouth, was gaping angrily at them from the ranks of the ruffians across deck.

The lieutenant walked to the front bearing his naked rapier in his hand, while the mutinous soldiers, half drunken with liquor looted from the stores of the ship, howled at him.

"Mamma's pet comes straight from the bath to drive about as cattle men that are men. Back to your crib, you reptile infant, or I'll grind you under my heel," threatened the leader.

In incoherent echo his followers stormed: "Throw him to the sharks, for cubs become wolves—cut him into pieces—cast him into the ovens!"

"Attention!" called the young man.

Something, perhaps innate animal respect for bravery, called for obedience. Silence and expectancy fell over them.

"You pretend to despise all your officers. I am the youngest and least among them, yet I dare the best among you to fight me here, I with this light rapier against your heavy cutlass."

The boastful leader pushed forward. Around the villain's head swung his cutlass flaming and glancing in the tropic sun.

"Aha! Aha! young sprig!" in half-drunken glee. "Hear the whistling air divide before my cutlass's edge. I'll strip you from your skin, inch by inch, and dry it on your cabin door. Come now, point to point, you young patrician fool!"

He struck a cleaving blow at the figure before him. The lieutenant's rapier caught the descending blade, wound itself in serpentine curves around it and drew away. The cutlass hurtled to the floor a half dozen paces distant. Numbness seized the mutineer's arm from wrist to shoulder. He examined the member in search of a wound, but found none.

The pack of insubordinates, impelled by their wolf-nature, would follow the leader if he conquered, or rend him if he fell.

Murmurs like the first swell of an angry sea rose among the mob, then burst into yells of derision.

"A schoolboy makes our mighty leader play the fool!"

"Yes, he swings his cutlass as a housewife the broom."

"Throw him overboard and elect a man, not some awkward cow!"

Young Mendoza stood with rapier poised, aimed at his opponent's heart.

"Curse the tricks of feinting and legerdemain your namby-pamby schools teach you in Madrid. Drop your steel fork there and I'll tear you to pieces with my hands."

Instantly the rapier was side by side with the cutlass.

The leader darted forward, his fists striking flaillike blows at the lithe form of the lieutenant.

Mendoza stepped lightly to one side. The opponent stumbled past him.

As the mutineer turned, the open palms of the clever boxer landed right and left with resounding smack on his nose and mouth. Raging and cursing, the ruffian

again sprang at the officer. Once, twice, thrice, did the youth's palms beat tattoo on his adversary's bleeding features. Dazed by the blows the man at last fell to the deck.

Hoarse, derisive cries from the band of mutineers again greeted the prostrate man.

"He went forth to chastise a babe, but, behold! it is a wondrous infant," groaned some fellow. "Rise up, brave one, a chance this time may help thee land that useless fist of thine."

The leader writhed alike at the ignominy of defeat and at the irony of his followers. Drawing a knife, as he gained his feet, he flew at Mendoza, despite warning cries even from the ranks of his own men.

The weapon drove straight out with murderous intent. A hush fell over both officers and mutineers.

It seemed an age before the blow came.

It struck on empty air, for the youth, as before, had deftly stood aside. As the other was driven past by his own momentum the boy seized him by the waist and neckband, raised him from the deck, and whirling him over his head, flung him headlong from the taffrail to the sea below.

A man-eating shark which had been following the ship swam toward its prospective prey. Its back fins swirled through the water, as it came dashing up. The poor wretch shrieked in agony. He tried to climb the slippery wood of the ship's side. Time after time he struck deep into the planks the knife which he still held, in vain endeavor to raise himself out of the water by this leverage.

"Help! help, friends, in the Virgin's name!" he entreated.

The shark had nearly reached him and was already turning on its side in preparation for its stroke of death.

Helplessness seemed to possess all.

A figure fell from the taffrail to the side of the desperate men. It was none other than Lieutenant Mendoza. Balancing himself lightly in the water, he wrenched the knife from his enemy's hand, and, as the shark came up, he buried it to the handle in the monster's brain. Its jaws snapped sullenly not the inches of a span away from the head of the screaming bully. Floundering helplessly the creature rolled away. Other man-eating sharks came to the scene. Some of them seized on their helpless brother and tore at his flesh while he still lived. Others swam straight for the human beings at the side of the ship.

By this time the spectators had recovered power of action. A boat was quickly lowered. Muskets and pistols in numbers were fired at the onrushing school of sharks.

Soon the rescued and rescuer were safe on board. There was talk among the officers of court-martials and executions, with the outcome, that, after much persuasion on the part of the young lieutenant, the commander granted his request that the leader be pardoned pending his good behavior.

The troops were not again recalcitrant.

From the swamps and the heat of the Philippines Captain Mendoza—for he had been promoted—re-

turned to Europe. Events which shook the world were stirring there. As an eagle flies to the rescue of its eyrie so hastened the descendant of the valiant Mendozas to the Spain of his fathers, to do battle for its safety.

The figure of Napoleon loomed ominously against Europe's peace. His ambitious hand was reaching for the crown of Spain, as, indeed, for all other crowns.

Into the awful carnage plunged Mendoza. A hundred blows he struck at the terrible Corsican, even though, often enough, the recoil threw him and his command reeling backward in defeat. Nevertheless, did he right nobly add honor and renown to the spotless banner of his house.

Only when Napoleon was exiled to Elba did he leave the field. Then, in command of his regiment, as colonel, he returned to Madrid.

His elder brother, rich in titles and wealth, influential at the Cortes, united his personal petition with the strong voice of the colonel's service in the field, to obtain for the younger man place and emolument.

The vast region of Alta California was then coming into great and favorable notice. Need there would surely be, in the Californias, of men of mettle and of wisdom to hold that province and its riches secure to Spanish rule.

Accordingly, large parcels of land in the valley of Santa Clara, fairest and most fertile in all that western Eden, California, were conferred by letters-patent on the soldier, Mendoza.

He loved a lady fair—Romalda. What man of his

family had not? Every knight of La Mancha had his Dulcinea, and Jesús Maria y José was true to his descent, even to the very finger-tips. The old crusader Mendozas, whose faces were carved in marble or painted on canvas in the ancestral home in Castile, had not been more chivalrous and romantic than was this now famous colonel.

Beautiful daydreams he wove and told to the listening ears of the noble lady. He had seen California, and knew well that part of it where his estate lay. The fire of poetry touched his words, as he sketched for her the estate mightier in length and breadth than any in Castile, fairer than Elysian fields, more fertile than the Andalusian meadows.

No landscape painter could limn mountains more picturesque and stately than did the words of Don Jesús Maria y José describe the eastern boundary of their domain in the land of far-away California. No minstrel could tell, in song or verse, of lake or bay so fair, so blue, as the inland sea which laved the western limit of their home-to-be.

Lady Romalda hearkened, and she smiled approvingly as she gave him her hand to kiss at parting.

"Soon will I return and claim my bride. The days I spend in the Californias, in preparation for your coming, will be as months and years to me."

She smiled kindly yet again, and waved a kiss at him as he rode forth from her father's gate to prepare the home for her across the many seas.

The soldier reached his California estate in due season, and with industry set about his task of love.

A hacienda house reached high its walls on an eminence near the mountain side of the estate. Moorish in architecture, its towers proudly surveyed the leagues of miles comprising the Mendoza grant. Tree and plant and flower smiled around it in the genial warmth of semitropic atmosphere. Avenues of olive lined its approaches. The Mission grapevine draped many arbors which were arranged in labyrinthine plan, all centering, after infinite curious turns, at the front door of the mansion.

Many ships brought furnishings from the world over for this wonderful palace.

The herds fattened for the killing, and were of great increase on this domain, as needs be, for the expense of the hacienda house was in keeping with its size and beauty.

At last all was ready for the bride. But——

Mexico had declared for independence, and was making good this declaration by force of arms. California would be compelled either to stand with Mexico or to fall with mother Spain. Colonel Mendoza's natural gifts included statecraft. He did not oppose the inevitable. California became a province of the republic of Mexico.

Now hastened the Colonel to claim his bride. In Madrid he found his brother dead, leaving no direct heir. The soldier-cavalier claimed title and estates, but the royal court rebuffed him. He was a foreigner now. His acceptance of Mexican dominion had cost him his Spanish citizenship. The laws of entail debarred him from succession.

He urged the inevitableness of the separation of Mexico from Spain, also his years of service in the Spanish army; likewise the claims of his family to the good will of the kingdom. All was in vain.

Hastening to the castle of his betrothed, he made known his presence, and asked to see the Lady Romalda.

Her father met him in his stead.

"My daughter, the noble doña, desires to see you not, Sir Foreigner. For my part I request that you depart from this place and never return."

"Foreigner or not, I'll hear the rejection from the lady's own lips. I demand to see the Lady Romalda, my affianced wife."

After much parley the father brought his daughter to see the determined man.

Mendoza told her again of the home prepared for her near the shores of the sunny Pacific, of the beauty and luxuriance well-nigh Oriental, of the wealth of the land, of the promise of the future.

"Peons, slaves, señorita, numbering hundreds, await your pleasure there. A princess will you be, and I will be your lover-husband. Say you will come with me."

The Lady Romalda smiled coldly. "You may become a self-styled prince among a barbarous and rebellious people. Be assured I shall never be a princess of such dishonor."

She swept in disdain from the room.

Mendoza returned to Madrid. Calling on the commander-in-chief of the Spanish army, he held before him the written letters of his colonelcy.

Santa Clara [illegible]
Free Library

"This paper means I am a colonel in the army of this kingdom. I am such no more." He tore in halves the commission.

"Are you a madman, Colonel Mendoza?" asked the general.

"Behold!"

Bending his sword over his knee he broke it into pieces and cast them on the floor. "By this act I forswear Spain forever."

The old general began to remonstrate with him, but Mendoza turned on his heel and was gone.

Great preparations were under way for the return to California of the lord of the rancho Mendoza with his lady bride. The whole valley was ready to make the occasion a gala time.

Alone, and by night, he came. Calling his majordomos and head peons together, he gave orders which were to be executed early on the morrow, by his thousand vassals.

They were frightened. "Our master is out of his head!" they exclaimed in awe-struck tones. Hastening they told some of the Spanish neighbors of the return of Señor Mendoza and of his startling commands.

The Spanish confreres were soon at the castlelike hacienda house.

"Señor, the Colonel Mendoza——" began one.

"Señor Mendoza I am. Never again colonel."

"But, señor, the peons tell us of your strange desires."

"My desires shall be executed, strange or not. At daybreak to-morrow not a stone stands on stone in this hacienda house. On these grounds not tree or plant

or shrub stands unuprooted before the darkness of another day."

"But, señor, has your visit to Spain affected——"

"My visit to Spain has affected me greatly. Friends and neighbors, at another time I, and all I have, shall be at your disposal. Permit me now to bid you good-night."

Very early next morning the hills echoed to the titanic roar of the powder magazine under the hacienda house, which had been kept there for uses of the hunt, and for defense and offense. Señor Mendoza's own hand had lighted the train. Soon fire skirted toppling tower and parapet, searched ruined reception halls, licked up furniture and bric-à-brac, and charred rare valuables. Daylight saw not Moorish castle, but blocks of blackened building stones and smoking rubbish.

Countless peons, with spades, picks and axes, dug up the green and growing things, broke down terraces, tore away grape arbors, and everywhere did works of devastation.

Señor Mendoza, as if commanding in battle, directed his workmen. Trees and shrubs were piled high. Fire, made hotter by kegs of turpentine, soon brought all to ash-heaps. Great pits were dug into which the stones of the hacienda building were placed, also the ashes from the bonfires.

"Now," commanded Mendoza, "fill in these trenches."

It was done.

"Señors," he said at nightfall, when all was over, "thus I bury the past. Henceforth, remember, I pray

you, that I am Señor Mendoza, the Californian, that, and that only."

The rains of the following winter made the site of the once-beautiful castle and grounds again a part of the rolling, grassy lands overlooking the valley.

Señor Mendoza devoted himself faithfully to the interests of his rancho and the welfare of California.

He built another home five miles from where the first had been, and altogether out of sight of it; a house of California style, the buildings forming three sides of a square, with a wall making the fourth side of the courtyard within.

In middle life the wish had come to found a family to succeed him in his possessions. He married the daughter of a neighbor, a maiden of Castilian blood, but of California birth. A child was born to them, a daughter, and in that hour his wife died. Never was parent kinder or gentler than Señor Mendoza to the Doña Carmelita, his pride and joy.

The authorities in Mexico City thought it right to deprive the Franciscan friars of a part of the lands they held in Alta California, this act of the secularization of the missions causing comment of both approval and disapproval.

The leaders in the capital city chose Señor Mendoza to administer the claims of church and state in the valley of Santa Clara. Thus he became administrator of the Mission of San José, where the opening of this story found him, a man of strength and of honesty, a statesman and a courtly gentleman.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGER VISITS SEÑOR MENDOZA

"PAPACITO mine, I'm all ready for the party this evening. My maids have just finished with me. What do you think of me?"

The Señorita Carmelita pirouetted into her father's sitting room, stood on one foot, then on the other, finally turning completely around.

"Papacito, what do you think of me?" she asked again.

The father knit his brows in pretended deep consideration.

"Hurry! Hurry, papacito! Really I can't wait any longer, I'm so anxious to know."

"My child, you make me think of a very pretty, very dainty wild flower."

"Just a flower, papacito?" in mock disappointment.

"Well, a flower with laughing eyes, splendid hair, and white plumage," pointing to her dress.

"That's better, little papa, somewhat better. Isn't it magnificent that we're to have a valecito casero? In school in Mexico City we went to bed regularly at eight o'clock. To-night it will be midnight, and later. When I think of my present freedom and the old school days

my heart rejoices itself; yet I loved the school and everyone in it. Often in dreams I am in those old rooms overlooking the Plaza Mercedes, and I hear the splashing of the fountains and the singing of the birds."

"My child's heart lives in scenes left behind months ago, yet the spirit rejoices in present liberty. Well, it is the way of the world."

Carmelita was sitting on the arm of her father's chair stroking his face and hands, and occasionally giving gentle pulls to his long mustache. Strangely alike were these two, the slender, dark-eyed girl, and the stalwart, graying man, athletic-appearing even in his years. The waving mane above his forehead was the prototype of the coal-black hair of the señorita which billowed over her shoulders and fell below her waist.

His cheek was bronze, showing dashes of red; hers was creamy, with the blush of youth surmounting; but it was the contour of face and form of both, strongly chiseled, yet superbly fine, that bespoke a model fashioned and perfected generations before in aristocratic Spain.

"What a philosopher my father is!" Then, after a moment: "Yesterday Señor Zelaya said to Señor Higuera, as they passed along the corridor, 'But the Administrator says that we must educate ourselves to a deeper appreciation—' I did not catch the rest. Señor Higuera replied, 'And the Administrator has a philosophy of deep and wide application.' Tell me about it."

"My daughter, I think you would prefer a more in-

teresting story. My philosophy, if you made it rightly, has been long in coming to me. On the other hand, the estate of womanhood now present with you seems to have grown overnight."

Carmelita arose, curtsied to her father, then resumed her seat.

"But my philosophy touches not any abstract principle. It deals only with powers that move the human heart."

"Vast political forces are astir in this old world of ours. The theory that God appoints kings is rapidly dissipating. The sun of democracy, long mantled by the fog of tyranny, shines soon in unobscured ray. In the to-morrow of to-morrow shall the people rule, as their right divine."

The señorita smiled into her father's eyes. "Lolita Hernandez once said to me, a long time ago, when she was petulant, that my father is a rebel. I replied by calling her a minx."

The old don made no reply; but continued: "'Westward the course of empire takes its way.' An English poet sings this truly and well. To the east of California is a republic destined to a colossal future, because it is founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and its national life rises toward a realization of that truth. To that height must rise not alone the Saxon but the Latin as well.

"The geography of nations in our Western world must soon change, under the influence of the democratic idea. As certain as the sun rose this morning and now urges to the setting, will either the American or the

English flag float from the staff within our courtyard before our province has seen but a few more years of life."

"But," hesitatingly from the girl, "will you not fight against this aggression?"

"No; nor could I stem the tide if I did. The logic of events grinds, as do the mills of the gods, exceeding fine. In the great world battle between people and potentate, victory, final and complete, will rest one day with the people. The cost of that battle will be measured in centuries of time, the blood of nations, the sacrifice of warriors and statesmen. Runnymede, in the south of England, in the year 1215, saw the beginning of the conflict when the people forced King John to sign the Magna Charta!"

"History speaks of the family de la Mendoza as made up of warriors. Your own name, father mine, is mentioned, and not as the least, yet you will never speak to me of any battle."

He pointed to a small painting. It depicted Waterloo.

"I'd give my experience of all the battles I've seen could I have stood there that evening with Wellington, on Mount Saint Jean, when the sun of day had set and Napoleon's sun of destiny with it. I would have rejoiced to have chased the emperor of the French over the plowed field at night, as does a hound drive the hare. Yet—what matters it all? As well for Napoleon to rule, or misrule, as for any other tyrant, be he anointed king or not. The day of the people comes, and I rejoice."

"Shall we follow new ways and customs then, my father?"

"Quite possibly. And yet, think you not it a pretty custom when the Spaniard comes with his guitar and improvises sweet music outside the embrasure window of the señorita? No?"

The doña blushed rosy red.

"What a papacito!" kissing him to cover her confusion. "How shall the señorita inside the embrasure prevent the music-inclined caballero on the outside from touching the strings of his guitar?"

Mendoza laughed while looking fondly at his daughter.

"You ask me how the doña may discourage the suitor? Ah, little one, how can I tell you? The claws show sharp and repelling, or presto! all is soft and smooth as velvet. What works the wonder, ask you? Ah, Carmelita mia! Lolita Hernandez is not the only minx in the world."

The girl playfully tugged at her father's thick hair.

"What a father is mine! He has seen all things and has accomplished all things," changing the subject. "Has ever there been an ungratified wish in your life, except the one to chase the emperor of the French across plowed fields? If so, now is your chance. I will be your fairy godmother. Come, make your wish, and, behold! It is done."

She had slipped from the chair and standing, held her arms extended over him. "Make your wish now," laughingly.

"My child, I have a wish, but its fulfillment would involve the folding together of events that time has unfolded; indeed, the turning backward of time."

She dropped her hands in concern. "O, papacito, tell me your desire," coming again to the arm of his chair.

He did not reply.

"O, little papa, you are so serious. Please tell me what it is."

"I wish, little girl, that as a stripling I had come here and had built my life into this Western world. That favor of kings I had never known—I care nothing for their disfavor—but of my own self, coupled with the resources with which nature has endowed California, I had evolved the best that fortune would have sent me, were it hacienda house and administratorship, or a humble hut with modest plot of ground, such as has the least of my peons."

A tap at the door.

"Enter," from Mendoza.

A peon stepped within. Thrice he bowed low to the master, then to the doña.

"Señor Mendoza, a stranger awaits you in the outer office."

"Does he give his name?"

"Here it is, señor."

The peon porter handed Mendoza a piece of paper on which was written, in bold, rough characters, "Charles O'Donnell."

"O'Donnell—O'Donnell—Let him enter."

The peon again bowed low to the master and his

daughter. Backing through the door, he bowed once more. Almost immediately the stranger, O'Donnell, stood in the doorway. Señor Mendoza was on his feet formally awaiting his visitor.

The man's broad, strong shoulders touched from doorpost to doorpost, his head barely coming within the door without his stooping. His buckskin shirt, opening low at the front, showed the long, red beard which was fastened together by a cord, and disappeared into the expanse of his chest.

His hair, darker than his beard, was long and bushy. This also was caught by a string and was partially hidden under his shirt.

Steely-blue eyes looked out over regular features. A sombrero was in his hand. His buckskin trousers were protected from hip to knee by shaggy leggings of bear-skin.

"Señor O'Donnell, will you enter and be seated?"

"I thank you." The stranger moved toward a chair with dignified and soldierly step.

"Señor, the Administrator Mendoza, I am here to inquire if you know of the present whereabouts of one Captain Farquharson, an Englishman who left Mexico City some months ago to hunt big game in our high Sierras here."

"Señor O'Donnell, why do you ask of me the present abiding place of this Englishman? I am Administrator of the Mission of San José. My jurisdiction does not reach to the high Sierras, nor to the city of Mexico."

Mendoza's glance was careless as he thus replied to the questioner.

"Ah, worthy señor, you are a well-known man in Alta California. Not less, perhaps, is your name known in the Mexican capital. What wonder, then, if some leisured traveler touching that capital should bear written words thence to you here? So I rode to you on my errand of inquiry. If you know nothing of the man, I shall ride still farther on my quest."

"Señor O'Donnell, famine is abroad, since the rains fall not. Entertainment for yourself and feed for your horse are welcome to you in my hacienda. Why not rest here for a while? Perhaps some of my majordomos may have news of this captain, or some of the peons recently returned from the headwaters of the river San Joaquin where our cattle are now grazing. The Sierras lie but across from these headwaters, and among our peons are hunters not a few. Rest among us, my friend O'Donnell, and from some direction you may find the information you are seeking."

The man shook his head. "My horse has carried me a hundred miles to-day, and yet he is ready to bear me farther. With such a mount I can find food for myself and fodder for him, easily, when night falls. Hear now his song? Drumlummon skirls a merry note."

With a laugh the bearded man arose. The screaming neigh of a stallion was echoing among the buildings of the hacienda.

"My horse is ready for the road. I thank you for your hospitality just the same. Adios, noble Administrator."

"Wait, good Señor O'Donnell. A glass of wine makes readier the foot for the stirrup."

He touched a bell. A peon came, and disappeared on his errand.

"Tell me, señor, while the wine is coming, do you know this Englishman of whom you speak as Farquharson?"

"Several years ago I saw Captain Farquharson considerably," tersely.

"Ah, Señor O'Donnell, you too are a soldier, as your bearing shows. You speak of your friend as Captain Farquharson. Perhaps you were brother officers in English service. Is it so?"

"No," hoarsely replied O'Donnell in English, "it was not so. I thought I'd done for the fellow that day on the parade ground——"

As he did not continue Señor Mendoza said: "Ah, my friend O'Donnell speaks the English. I have studied your language and I read your books," indicating a shelf on which were a number of works by English historians and political economists. "Ah, here comes the wine."

"Forgive my curiosity, Señor O'Donnell, in my recent questioning. I am greatly interested in English officers. Just before you came I was speaking with my daughter of the battle of Waterloo. You could not have been present. You have not years enough," looking at the face, yet young, of the man before him.

"I was not in the army at that time," replied O'Donnell. "Allow me to say, Señor Administrator, you serve nectar here," sipping his wine.

"This Farquharson," persisted Mendoza, "who you say is older than you, perhaps he took part in that famous battle."

"I did not say Farquharson is older than I. I said I once knew him."

A dark look shaded O'Donnell's face as he spoke.

"Perhaps you were rivals in those times," still persisted Mendoza, noticing the shadows. "Some wine in your glass, my friend? Well, war and love have made many an enemy."

Again the neigh of the stallion was heard.

"Drumlummon's second call. I must be going. Perhaps Captain Farquharson may call on you soon. Indeed, I'm sure he will; for I remember now that he has letters of introduction to you from Don Juan Domingo, first assistant to the secretary of state of Mexico."

Señor Mendoza bowed courteously, as if some ordinary information had been given him.

A sound of approaching voices reached their ears.

"Papacito, our guests are arriving. I shall leave you." Carmelita approached from the rear of the room where she had been occupied with a book.

The squeaking of carretas (wooden wagons) was now plainly heard, also the tramp of horses, the laughter of men, and the gay, bantering tones of women. Anon arose the angry cry of O'Donnell's stallion.

"The guests are truly coming. Carmelita, my child, see that the servants neglect neither duty nor courtesy."

To O'Donnell, who was standing ready to depart: "Señor, I'll attend you myself as you go forth."

Soon the dressing rooms were filled with young girls, laughing and joyous. A dash of powder on the face, the hair smoother, laces adjusted, all under the watchful eye of mother or dueña.

The young dandies in their rooms were scarcely less fastidious than their sweethearts and sisters.

At a quarter before six the company was assembled in the reception hall. Jokes and sallies went around the room.

Carmelita noticed that her father was not present and sent a peon to call him. The servant returned with the word that the señor and the gringo stranger were in the outer office. He did not dare disturb them.

Five minutes passed. Merriment grew louder. Some one saw on a secretary a chart giving the places of the guests at table. The merrymakers crowded around.

The doña slipped away and no one noticed.

Her father and O'Donnell were standing just outside the courtyard gate. Two or three peons were holding O'Donnell's horse which was restive, pawing and biting at them. The two men spoke English and thus freely, as none of the peons understood that tongue.

"Men are playing to-day and an empire makes the stake," O'Donnell said. "Farquharson is sitting in the game, and, by faith! so am I."

Mendoza nodded.

"And, Administrator Mendoza, so are you—and the chief player! Did not your recent visit to Mexico acquaint you with the trump card?"

Mendoza smiled pleasantly.

The stallion came closer to them, dragging the peons with him. He seized the shirt of one of them and tore it from his back.

"Quiet, Drumlummon!" Then to the servants, "Unloose him." The huge animal came fawning to his side.

Without touching hand to the horse O'Donnell vaulted the saddle.

"A moment, O'Donnell."

The man leaned in his saddle.

"You say I'm sitting in the game and the stake is large. Well said, perhaps. But remember, if I play I'll use the card that means the most to the province of California." The señor again nodded, as if retailing some pleasantry of the day.

O'Donnell rode away.

"Papacito!" called Carmelita. "It is late. We are waiting."

In a moment they were with their guests.

Folding doors opened and the well-lighted dining room was before them.

At once dinner was under way. The peons, trained by Mendoza, served well. The generous hospitality of early California found expression in the viands and vintages which Mendoza offered his guests. Peons touched fitting music from stringed instruments; others sang in the melodious voice of the aborigine.

"Señorita Mendoza, heard you not that the great spring merienda comes early this year by reason of the drought?" asked Captain Morando.

"Does a picnic so interest you, Comandante Morando?"

"Never have I seen such a picnic as must be the spring merienda in the valley of Calaveras. Everywhere I hear people speak of it."

"Soon you may judge of its excellence for yourself. Now begins to sing my peona, Modesta. Her voice equals in sweetness the notes of the thrush. Listen,

while she gives the ancient airs of Oroysom. They are heart-touching and beautiful."

The señorita's dueña engaged Moranda's attention the moment the singing ceased, suddenly remembering to ask for some acquaintance in San José.

"Señorita Doña Mendoza, say I have your first dance this evening?" called Abelardo Peralto from across the table.

"I, the second," cried Miguel Soto.

"I, the third," from another.

"Señorita Doña," asked Morando as soon as he was at liberty, "have you a dance left for me?"

"First come, first served, is the law in this province," she replied mischievously.

"Then I am to have no dance with you to-night," despairingly.

"Did you ever hear the saying about the early bird and the worm, Captain?" laughed Peralta.

"I object to being compared to a worm," said Carmelita. "For your punishment, Señor Don Abelardo Peralta, I deprive you of the grand march, which belongs to the first dance, and I give it to the Señor Captain."

"Woe! Woe!" cried Peralta. "I will be the worm, Señorita Mendoza. You are the beautiful early bird. O, do not punish me!"

The girl looked at him with mock severity. "I have given my sentence."

The host touched a bell.

"Are we ready for the dancing?" he asked.

The company cheered heartily.

"I hear the musicians tuning their instruments. Let us hence. If we cannot have the patter of rain during this season of drought, we can at least have the patter of feet."

Laughing and happy, the sons and daughters of the province repaired to the dancing room.

CHAPTER V

ANOTHER STRANGER MAKES A VISIT

"I HEAR the neigh of horses and the shouts of men. Has Dario, the head vaquero, returned from the valley of the San Joaquin? Or, perchance, is it some messenger from him?"

"Reverend padre, you hear the work Indians returning with their farm animals from the irrigated ground near the great spring. It is the noon hour."

The first speaker was the friar, Lusciano Osuna, spiritual head of the Mission San José. He was temporal head also of the Mission grounds and buildings, together with a wide strip of country reaching over rolling land, hills and mountains, away east to the San Joaquin River.

The padre was ill. His parched lips and flushed forehead showed him to be in the grip of fever. Restlessly he tossed from side to side of his bed. It was an unusual-appearing bed. Hewn redwood logs of goodly dimension had been made in a frame held together by mortising at the corners. Strips of rawhide ran across the frame from side to side, another layer from end to end. A pallet of straw was the mattress; the covering was lambskin tanned without removing the wool.

"Open the window and the door, Juan Antonio. My blood boils away in this heat, and my strength ebbs out."

The hot north wind, which for days had been scorching the valley of Santa Clara, rolled into the room.

"It is little avail, dear father, to seek or avoid aughts when the San Joaquin fever possesses one. Its nature is to burn till the body seems a crisp, then to freeze till the flesh is like damp clay."

"Juan Antonio, you are right. Still, it is a satisfaction to feel the living air whether it touches one's ailment or not."

The light from the open window shone on the friar's face. He was nervously pulling his heavy black beard through his fingers. The features thus brought into relief were those of the hidalgo, bold and strong, and were illuminated by keen intelligence within. The skin showed another strain darker than Caucasian.

"Antonio, did all the Indians attend chapel this morning? Have you heard of any further evidences of lapse into paganism anywhere in the valley?"

"Our Indians, men, women and children, are faithful in their attendance, since the day you quenched the evil spirit in them. To-morrow we conclude the Novena —nine days' prayer—for you. All are praying most fervently that our Lady and Saint Francis, yes, and San José, will favor us and you with speedy and complete recovery."

"You are good, very good, my major-domo."

"To-day at morning meal were some Indians from

the San Blas just in at Monterey. At once I dispatched thither the peon, Pedro Carrasca, the best rider in the valley. Six hours' journey it is to Monterey, six hours' rest, and six returning, makes eighteen. Pedro Carrasca rests not if among the ship's goods is numbered jesuit bark, but he presses homeward with the medicine. For each hour less than twelve that he consumes in rounding Monterey from here I have promised him five and twenty pesos."

"You have done well. My illness possesses me, Juan Antonio. Not that I resist suffering. Did not my great master, Saint Francis of Assisi, bear the sacred stigmata on side and hands and feet?"

The Indian reverently made the sign of the cross.

The padre went on:

"Antonio, you speak of the Novena. How many days have we been back?"

"Eight days."

"It has seemed longer, much longer."

"That was a hard ride for you from the river country, Señor Padre."

"Yes, it was."

"Swinging over mountain and scaling precipice, as did we, is doubly difficult for one scarcely able to sit in the saddle."

"And what found I here? Men, and women too, whom our fathers redeemed from savagery, dancing in pagan worship around fires which, doubtless, shortly would have become fires of sacrifice."

"I know, holy padre; and I remember too that they followed us to the church, consumed by that strange

fury; yet you drove the blood demon from their hearts, so that they killed not, nor destroyed, but obeyed your commands; yes, even till now."

The Indian again made the sign of the cross.

"It is well to forget—well to forget," mused the friar. "The children, after all, are good children."

The padre was endeavoring to hold himself against some tremendous inward tension. He clenched his hands and shut tight his teeth. Nature could not sustain him and his teeth began to chatter, while his hands wrapped the closer the lambskin coverlet about his form.

The Indian major-domo closed the door. Hastening to the window he drew the sash into place; then began chafing the padre's wrists and palms.

"Courage, good padre, courage! A little time and the blood is warm again, the strength revives. If only Pedro Carrasca were here with the jesuit bark! but he comes not before nightfall, I fear."

The friar's eyes closed listlessly. His hands grew colder, despite the vigorous treatment given by the Indian. His breath was short and weak.

"Dios y Maria!" exclaimed Juan Antonio. He took the friar's robe hanging from a peg on the wall, and carefully spread it over the fainting man.

"Comes now the chill and the heart weakens," muttered the faithful major-domo. "That hurried ride from the San Joaquin, the worry over the Mission, the drought——"

Footsteps sounded in the corridor. Antonio called, then gave incisive commands in the Indian tongue. The

feet scurried away. He continued the energetic rubbing, praying the while.

Excited voices were heard approaching. The door was flung open, and instantly the room was filled with Indians. A woman brought a kettle of hot water; another, a stone vessel. A man brought a decanter of aguardiente. Whispering, praying Indians ran up and down the corridor.

As the women saw the padre's face, white and still, they thought life had gone out. Grief filled their hearts, welled into their eyes and found vent by their tongue. The loud wail of the death-bedside arose, quavered, fell, in the old adobe house.

Juan Antonio endeavored to silence them.

"Quick, with the hot cloths for the feet, Luisa! Make ready the heated brandy, you, Crispinilla! Quick, women, the padre's need is urgent!"

A sigh came from the priest. Then all was still. He seemed to sink lower into his couch.

Even Juan Antonio thought that now life was gone. Instincts of forgotten generations stirred the old man's heart. He began to intone the death praises of the friar, as, for untold years, had his forbears done for the great ones of their tribe.

"The mighty heart is still. The strong hand bends not the bow. The ready feet run not. The king elk walks boldly in the open. The timid deer fears not the arrow, because the chief man of his people hunts no more."

The refrain of the death-wail overflowed the houses of the Mission, ran along olive orchard and vineyard,

reacned the sentinels watching on the hills. The church bell, in sorrowing tone, sounded its toll of death. One and thirty did it strike, the total of the years the friar had lived.

At the last stroke the padre's eyelids flickered gently. The pallor of his cheeks decreased. Breathing, almost imperceptible, began. Finally, he opened his eyes, and saw the weeping, gesticulating men and women.

"Silence!" he said feebly. "What see I here?"

Again, in stronger accent, "What see I here?"

Yet again, "What see I here!"

In this third utterance the churchman spoke as might a king in presence of his subjects. The wailing ceased.

He raised himself on elbow and pointed to the door.

"This cell is within the precinct of sacred cloister. Go, women, one and all! Get ye gone from this holy place!"

The women fell away from the bed and seemed to melt through the door, the men following them. Soon Juan Antonio stood alone with the padre.

"What have you done?" demanded the friar, sternly. Perspiration again was on his forehead, while the returning fever gave color tc the face and strength to the body.

"O, Padre Lusciano, I feared you were dying. All my thoughts were for nothing but to save you, and I called for help, come whence it might."

"Juan Antonio, around this cell, though poor and humble, has Holy Church drawn her solemn circle of isolation. Let no woman enter herein, even to save my life. If I die, then so I must. Did I pronounce the

curse on the luckless daughter of Eve and her male abettors in this sacrilege, no one, save the vicar of Christ in Rome, could banish it. See, Juan Antonio, what vast evil thy thoughtless hand might wreak."

"O, padre," wept the Indian, "I thought thy life was struggling to free itself of body, and my heart became water within me, for I love thee."

"Very well. Very well. But, Juan Antonio, in the future think with thy head, not with love or fear."

Señor Mendoza appeared in the open door.

"Reverend Padre Osuna, will you pardon my coming unannounced? Each day since you returned have my servants made inquiry, but found you too ill to receive a visitor."

"Enter, Señor Mendoza. Please seat yourself."

"Thank you, sir Padre. I had a small quantity of jesuit bark, invaluable in this fever-and-ague affliction. Unfortunately, I mislaid the bark, not finding it till to-day, and I came but now to bring it in person."

"Very kind of you, señor."

"I heard the death-wail of the Indians; heard, also, the toll of the bell marking the passing of an officer of the church. Your Indians first told me you were dead, then that you had risen from the dead. So, I congratulate you, most happy that no need exists for condolences to anyone. Padre Osuna, here is the bark."

Juan Antonio took the bark and laid it on a table by the bed of the friar.

"Many thanks, señor, for your goodness. As head of this Mission of San José I accept the gift from Señor Mendoza."

Mendoza laughed pleasantly. "Then, reverend señor, as administrator of this Mission of San José, I offer a little gift of Jesuit bark to the spiritual leader of the vicinity."

"Señor Mendoza, I can recognize no administrator of these mission lands, save one, and that is I, Padre Lusciano Osuna. My Franciscan brethren rescued this country from wilderness and its people from savagery. This Mexican government of yours then comes, takes away two thirds of the land and its appurtenances, and gives it to you and to others who accept it and hold it. By government sanction you administer, Señor Mendoza; but, I hold, unjustly. Never by word or act shall I acknowledge your authority in this valley of Santa Clara."

Señor Mendoza smiled. His equanimity was not easily upset.

"Good reverend padre, hear me. Your fathers did, indeed, redeem this country and its savage tribes. A mighty work surely has been done. But, because of freeing the natives from paganism, should you hold this vast province in fee simple? Is it right that a score of monks should own the land from San Diego to Yerba Buena? The friars still possess more land than they can either occupy or cultivate—but I ask your pardon for talking thus long when you are ill. I trust the jesuit bark will not fail of its customary happy effect."

"Your wish is generous, Señor Mendoza."

"Just one short word more. I would like to thank you deeply, in the name of my neighbors and myself, for your work in quieting the Indians the day of your

return from San Joaquin valley. I doubt not your coming meant more than many of us realize."

"I simply fulfilled the duties of my position. Nothing more."

"Good-day, Padre Lusciano. I hope your good health will soon return."

The Administrator departed.

"Shut the door, Juan. I feel I may sleep. Go forth to your duties. When I awake I will call you. Go, now, while sleep is heavy on my eyelids."

Juan Antonio went to the door. Hesitating a moment he turned, with: "Reverend father, shall I not prepare a draught of the bark which Señor Mendoza left for you?"

"Go forth to your duties, man. I can accept no gift from Señor Mendoza if the acceptance implies acknowledgment of his administratorship. I will return him his jesuit bark. The call of principle is higher than the claim of bodily health."

The major-domo closed the door. Sleep came to the friar.

The Mission buildings were constructed in accordance with the architecture in vogue in California at that time. Buildings formed three sides of an inclosure, a courtyard gate and wall the fourth. On one side were housed the unmarried Indian women. Across the deep courtyard lived the single men. The third row of structures gave home to the major-domo, the chief vaquero, or herdsman, and the families of each. Under the same roof with these latter were the shops of the carpenters, the blacksmiths, and the various other ar-

tisans of the Mission. This side of the square opened into the freedom of the courtyard.

A man came to the carpenter shop and stepped within. "Is the padre here?" he inquired.

The master carpenter replied, "Our padre is ill."

"I have most important letters which should be delivered to him in person."

"Go then, to the major-domo."

The newcomer walked toward Juan Antonio. In his dress the man was the ordinary traveler of the day. Tanned-skin shirt and trousers, shaggy leggings and wide hat, distinguished him in no manner from a dozen other wayfarers who, between dawn and night, might come on some quest to the Mission.

The deep-set, gleaming eyes of the old Indian surveyed him from foot to crown. He saw a man in the prime of life, his face parched by tropical sun to the color of leather. A military mustache was on his lip.

"You wish to see me?" asked Juan Antonio.

"I wish to see Padre Lusciano. I have letters introducing me to him."

"The padre is firmly held by fever-and-ague. Little strength is left to him. If you will, I'll carry your letters to him. I'm going to see him now. You rest, while I'm gone, in the porter's lodge; or, if you like, go over to Señor Mendoza's property across the way."

"Thanks, many. I'll wait in the lodge. Here are the letters."

The major-domo disappeared into the padre's quarters. Soon he was again at the stranger's side.

"Padre Lusciano says come."

He followed the Indian through alcove and corridor to the friar's bedroom.

"Your name is Captain Farquharson, I learn. Juan Antonio, a chair for this brother. Seat yourself, good sir. Now," to the Indian, "close the door and stay not far away. I'll call you when I want you."

They were a short time in earnest conversation.

The stranger opened the door to leave.

"Antonio," called the padre. The Indian came quickly. "Conduct my visitor outside, then return."

Major-domo and caller passed through the courtyard.

"Amar Dios!" the Indian said at parting.

"Many thanks for your attention," from the other.

Juan Antonio returned to the friar's room.

"Take these letters and lock them in my desk there. Bring me the key. Good. Now, attend carefully to what I say."

"Yes, Señor Padre."

"Tell no one the name of the man whom you have just escorted out."

"It shall be as you say, Reverend Padre."

"It is well. The giant, ambition, stirs in his sleep. Soon he awakes and moves to action." Then, in half aside: "Mexico has wrought the undoing of our missions. If a chance of retrieval comes why should I not —but Misericordia!"

A great cheering was heard in the courtyard.

"Go, see the cause, and come and tell me, Antonio."

"Glorious news!" the Indian hastening back. "Pedro Carrasca returns from Monterey two hours before the

time, and has an abundance of Jesuit bark in his saddle-bags. More yet, good padre. A messenger from Dario. He is the third messenger sent—Yoscolo and Stanislaus must have captured the others. Dario has driven our herds far into the valley of the San Joaquin River; and, the man says, soon will they fat for the matanza" (the killing).

"'Tis well, Juan. Bring me a portion of the bark, then I'll rest a little. In the chapel to-night pray fervently for rain, and thank God for his mercies; and ask him to avert war and bloodshed from our province here, and from the whole world. Shut the door now. Carry my blessing to the children when they are assembled for evening prayer."

The door closed and the major-domo went about his many tasks.

CHAPTER VI

THE MERIENDA

"DAUGHTER mine, awake! 'Tis the day of the merienda."

"I'm up, little papa."

A rasp of file on flint was heard as she struck a light.

"Ugh-oo-oo! the water's cold."

The old don laughed. "Cold water drives the sands of sleep from the eyelids, child."

He walked along the corridor to his sitting room. The large time-piece showed four o'clock and three minutes. Five minutes later his daughter joined him, clad in tanned-skin blouse and skirt, with a straw sombrero on her head.

"Here I am, papacito. Is breakfast ready?"

"Breakfast waits, but the coming of the morning waits not."

The peons served them by candlelight.

Soon they were ready for the start.

Before the courtyard gate were the doña's carreta, the señor's horse, and a squad of mounted fighting peons. Servants placed soft tule grass in the carreta, lambwool comforters, for greater ease in riding.

In double file marched the mounted peon soldiers, the carreta between, while the lord of the hacienda rode by

his daughter's side. Thus they reached the plaza of the village near the Mission San José.

The place was alive with carretas bearing mothers, dueñas, and daughters, with caballeros, with bustling peons and early-risen Indian children.

Lanterns were strung around the square, in the middle of which blazed a big bonfire. The caballeros capered their horses before the carretas. The señoritas applauded by "Brava! Brava!" or shrieked at some unusually daring equestrian feat.

Captain Moranda was early at the plaza. Many a señorita turned her glance from adventurous youth and cavorting horse to the soldier in trig uniform, whose steed was frequently by the side of Doña Carmelita's carreta.

Preparations were now under way for the setting-out. Each carreta now had four horses, tandem, a postilion mounting the wheel animal of each team.

"Sunlight on the peak!" intoned a peon stationed on a rooftop.

Señor Mendoza, in charge of the affair, looked carefully over the carretas arranged longitudinally, the caballeros around them, and the fighting peons armed with carbine and saber. "Adelante!" he shouted and galloped away at the head of the cavalcade.

The carretas surged forward. At the end of an hour, half way up the mountain, Mendoza gave a command to halt.

The eastern sky was rosy. The morning star still shone undimmed though all others had retired. The cañon facing the procession was hidden in purple twi-

light, while the mountain peak blazed like some glory throne. The joyful men and women became silent before the majesty.

In the valley the light was chasing the shadows up the hills. These shadows were flying to the picnickers as if for protection, when, lo! the sun was on the eastern horizon.

Mendoza signaled Captain Morando, who chanted the opening line of Saint Francis of Assisi's "Canticle to the Sun."

Tongue after tongue caught up the words. The Indians, who had been taught singing and knew well the music of the church, united with the others, and the swell of five hundred voices rolled over valley and hill.

"O, most high, Almighty, good Lord, to thee belong the praise, honor, and all blessings:

"Praised be our Lord, for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which thou upholdest in life all creatures.

"Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble, and precious, and clean.

"Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright, and pleasant, and very mighty and strong.

"Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits and flowers of many colors, and grass."

"Adelante!" again called Mendoza, and once more they were off. The odor of pine reached them at one

height; at another the resinous redwood, in mammoth groves, pointed skyward. The señoritas and caballeros talked, laughed, sang, and perhaps mildly flirted.

At ten o'clock they reached the entrance to the cañon which marked the beginning of Calaveras Valley. Vast tangles of blackberry bushes were everywhere, creeping up the cañon side, festooning projecting rocks, climbing trees, ivylike, and dropping their branches dark with ripening fruit. Tinkling rills ran along, unaffected by the drought. Colonies of birds floated in the air, sang in the trees, or, fluttering around the vines, ate their fill.

From time immemorial these grounds had been carefully guarded from everyone till the merienda day at close of spring, on which occasion the first fruits were gathered by the land barons and their select company, with feasting, dancing, and merrymaking.

After that day all embargo was removed, and the products of the valley were free to all.

According to custom the señorita whose carriage first reached the merienda ground was queen of the day, and an early-California chariot race occurred yearly here.

Down the inclined way the carretas went, toward the bottom of the valley where the choicest berries grew.

Mendoza wheeled his horse and gave the command to stop. "We rest a few minutes. Then, let the carretas which compete in the race range themselves as will be directed, and start at the word."

Pedro Zelaya and Fulgencio Higuera were appointed judges.

Carreta after carreta drew forward. Soon a score or more were side by side, to enter the contest.

The judges were busy moving one team forward, another back. When all were at equal advantage the stalwart Higuera called:

"Make ready! Run!"

Away they went, the caballeros fringing the sides, the other carretas trailing in the rear. Weeks of patient labor of the peons had made the course even and smooth.

"Now! Now!" cried Hernandez. "I'll show Mendoza my Mexican imported horseflesh is superior to his Californians. Boy," to the postilion, "taut with the reins, and ready with the whip!"

"Hoop-la! Hoop-la!" the drivers shouted to their straining teams, the long whiplashes curling from their hands and touching the splendid animals in stinging crack, while the caballeros admonished or encouraged.

"The spur on the wheeler, Miguel! The lash on that leader!" or, "Grande! Grande! Martino. Another such spurt and you win!"

Lolita Hernandez, Alfreda Castro and Carmelita Mendoza were ahead. For a minute the three carretas ran neck and neck.

Marcel Hernandez, father of Lolita, rode by her team. In the enthusiasm of the moment he urged the horses with his riding-whip and joined with the postilions in shouting, "Hoop-la! Hoop-la!"

Patricio Martinez, Alfreda's long-time cavalier, hovered near her, shouting: "Now's your chance, Diego! Stir up that pinto! Ease the bit on that sorrel! Go it, my beauties!"

The Doña Carmelita's peon had a cool head, driving so as to draw from the other racers their best speed. Little by little he lessened the swiftnes of his own horses, allowing the others to forge ahead.

The Hernandez Mexicans and the Castro Andalusians held their own, side by side, as if in double harness. For more than a hundred paces it seemed neither one gained nor lost a hairbreadth. Suddenly the Castro animals winded. High-stepping and proud, they gradually lost. Magnificent in their defeat they fell back.

"Huzza! Huzza!" yelled Hernandez. "I knew I breed the best stock in the valley. My daughter shall be queen of the fiesta."

Then Carmelita's peon gave rein to his horses. They sprang from the ground and rushed onward. For an instant the two carretas ran together, each splendid horse, straight-backed, ears low, nostrils distended, striking his feet in unison with his fellows. Soon the Hernandez team began to slip backward foot by foot.

"Diablo! Diablo!" thundered Hernandez. "Peon, urge your horses! Use the whip!"

The Hernandez Indian dug his spurs into his mount, and cruelly flayed the leaders.

The other carreta yet more quickly moved ahead. Already the Mendoza wheeler was abreast the Hernandez leader.

Above the roar of the vehicles sounded the plaudits of the caballeros.

"Viva! Viva, Mendoza! Viva the California horses! Viva the Señorita Mendoza!"

A stone the size of a walnut caught in the hind shoe

of Mendoza's wheeler. The steady pace of his horses broke.

The Hernandez animals pressed on.

"Swing out, boy, swing out! Sweep in from the side!" exulted Hernandez. "Victory for the Mexican horses!"

The driver turned his team. "Bueno, boy, bueno! Now straight ahead! Loose the rein! Let 'em go!"

The Mendoza postilion bent affectionately over his horse. "Fly, Mercurio! Fly! for the doña's sake!"

He unstrung his whiplash. It burned the leaders with living fire. They leaped forward, the tremendous stride flinging the pebbles from the wheeler's hoof.

Along the roadway the horses sped, lessening the Hernandez advantage at every bound. After them poured the yelling, gesticulating crowd.

A hundred paces only remained.

The shouting ceased, the tenseness of the moment closing every throat.

The Mendoza carreta overtook the other, passed it, and reached the goal two lengths ahead. Carmelita was the queen of the day!

With a flourish the Doña Carmelita's postilion drew up before the pavilion at the merienda ground, Mendoza and Captain Morando assisting the breathless, excited girl to alight.

Caballero and carreta whirled into the open space around her.

"Hail! Hail, to the queen of the merienda!" arose on all sides. She bowed right and left in acknowledgment.

On one side of the building stood a dais whence the queen ruled her loyal subjects.

"Come, little one," her father said. "Your ladies of honor will accompany you to your throne."

Lolita and Alfreda walked with her to the dais, then curtsied in deference.

"Your wishes, queen of the merienda?" they asked.

"For one hour let matron, maid, and man gather blackberries for the feast. Then all shall come to luncheon in the pavilion, not forgetting to bring the fruits of their labor. For the afternoon my command is that all enjoy themselves to the full."

Thus briefly spoke the ruler of the day; after which she took her willow basket and hastened to gather berries, as did her maids of honor and everyone else.

The appointed time saw all assembled near the feast tables which had been made ready by the peons. Heaping dishes of berries were conspicuous among a variety and abundance of viands.

Colonel Barcelo, commander of the presidio at Monterey, with his wife and her younger sister, the Señora Valentino, rode up on horseback.

The Colonel and his wife were well known to the picnickers. His sister-in-law had but lately arrived from Madrid.

The newcomers were accorded a gracious reception.

"Happened to be visiting near San José. Hearing of the merienda, we came along without an invitation," said Barcelo, laughing. "Besides, I wished Señora Valentino to witness one of our festal days. It is unique. Madrid itself holds nothing to equal it."

The brown eyes of the lady from Madrid flashed in accompaniment to her pearly teeth. "Rare things have I seen in California in the fortnight I am here."

"In a moment luncheon is served. My worthy Barcelo, I invite you and your party to our table. My daughter and a few others sit with us. Come, friends," spoke Señor Mendoza, true to the unbounded hospitality of the California grandee.

A peon sounded a gong. The hungry merienda folk lost little time in coming to the meal.

Señor Mendoza was at the head of his table, Doña Carmelita at the foot. At the host's right and left were seated Colonel Barcelo and his wife; Señora Valentino, by his sister. The ladies of honor, with Hernandez, who sat by his daughter, filled the other places, except one. This had been reserved for Morando, who now came up.

"An accident to one of the horsemen detained me for the past half hour," was his explanation to Señor Mendoza.

"A caballero's misfortune always calls for assistance from a brother," replied Mendoza. Continuing: "Captain Morando, I wish to introduce you to Señora Valentino, who favors us to-day by her presence with her relatives, the Barcelos. Señora Valentino, may I present Captain Moranda?"

The señora acknowledged pleasantly the Captain's low bow.

"Captain, to your chair," from Mendoza.

Conversation lulled for a little. Early hours and open air had given zest to the appetite.

"My dear Señora Valentino, I wish you could have seen our carreta race this morning," remarked Señor Mendoza. "But it will not be the last."

"While I say nothing against the race of this morning as such," interposed Hernandez, "for it was good enough as far as it went, I do claim that my horses were better than yours, Mendoza. Your peon rider happened to be more at home in his business than was mine, nothing more. I wish I had been in that postilion's place myself; then there would have been a different story to tell."

"A horse can display but the swiftness his limbs possess," rebutted Mendoza.

"Riding is not what I knew in my youth," commented Hernandez, who was giving ample appreciation to the pleasures of the table.

"Captain Morando, were you not at a ball given in Madrid last year by the officers of General Guerrero's division in their quarters?" said Señora Valentino.

"I was, indeed. And now, señora, I remember you well. Strange I did not recall you at first."

"The fact that I was in ball-dress then and in riding-habit now is, undoubtedly, what prevented you from recognizing me before."

"Why, we have old friends here!" interjected Colonel Barcelo.

"How is Colonel Valentino, your husband?"

"Shortly after that ball of which we speak my husband was ordered to service in Morocco, and there he laid down his life for his country."

"I regret that my question called up sad memories.

Nearly a year have I been away from Madrid, and news travels slowly to us here. I offer to you my sympathy in your great loss."

"You are very kind, Lieutenant—I should say, 'Captain' Morando. But—what is past is gone. It is well, then, to forget. A wonderful life these Californians live!"

"I trust Colonel Barcelo and his lady will find opportunity while in this vicinity to bring you, señora, to visit us at our home in Mission San José. What says my daughter?"

The Doña Carmelita cordially seconded her father's invitation. The Barcelos accepted; the Señora Valentino likewise.

"Mission San José—Mission San José—" mused the latter. "Is there not living there a Franciscan friar, one Lusciano Osuna?"

"It is so," assented Mendoza.

"I heard he was in California, and as you mentioned the Mission San José it came to me that was given as his present home."

"A man of some importance, probably, in Spain," volunteered Señor Hernandez.

"I do not know him personally," replied Señora Valentino. "In the cathedral of Barcelona I heard him give the Lenten sermons several years ago. It was quite shortly after his ordination, but his discourses possessed rare charm and power. The city was literally at his feet."

"Strange such a man comes here as a mission padre?" observed Hernandez.

"It was his request. Some unknown powerful influence seconded him, else Spain would not have lost her great preacher."

At that moment the strains of the grand march floated through the pavilion, from the excellent orchestra provided for the dancing.

Captain Morando was quickly at Doña Carmelita's side. "Señorita the Doña Mendoza, may I claim your favor for the grand march and the waltz following?"

It was granted.

Carmelita and Morando were at once circling in the waltz.

"I still have the rose which fell to me from the sky one moonlit night a month ago."

"Does it keep so long?" mischievously.

"It is pressed in a book of poems. Each couplet of book-leaves holds a petal. The odor of the petals speaks to me the same thought which is the subject of these poems. Shall I tell you what it is, Señorita Doña?"

"Hush! the music ceases. Lead me to a resting place."

There was to be no resting for Señorita Mendoza. Importunate youths claimed dance after dance.

The elders, men and women, were scattered around in groups, some looking at the dancing, others conversing, a few playing cards.

Señor Valentino, owing to her recent bereavement, did not dance. She seated herself on a rustic bench beneath a widespread sycamore, where she was soon the center of an interested coterie. The lady so recently

from Madrid retailed to Spanish-born gentry the news of the distant imperial city.

After a while Captain Morando came up. Soon the two were in animated conversation.

"Ah! Captain, not on the floor! Foot-weary so soon?" spoke a dueña who now joined them.

"No, señora, not foot-weary. I forego for a time the pleasures of the dance that I may listen to the words of our beautiful visitor here."

He made a low bow to Señora Valentino, who laughingly extended her hand to him. He bent sweepingly over it, barely touching the ends of her fingers with his.

"The Señor Captain Morando!" a man's voice called at his elbow. It was Abelardo Peralta. The music and dancing had stopped. The guests were assembling around the dais on which was seated Doña Carmelita.

"Our queen demands your presence, Señor Captain," Peralta went on.

The Captain was shortly before her majesty the queen of the fiesta.

"The games are about to begin, Captain Morando. Do you not remember that I appointed you and Don Abelardo to define the boundaries of the racing course, and to determine the various goals? Also please to remind the Señora Valentino that she is requested to crown the victors."

As the afternoon waned the interest in the athletic events increased. The footraces for young men showed that the sons of the province were nimble of limb, and won the approbation of Pedro Zelaya himself, whose

swiftness was credited with being only less than a fast-galloping horse.

The señoritas ran a shorter course very creditably.

Then came a contest of knife-throwing in which the men of the period were wonderfully proficient. The knife was flung, blade extended, from the palm of the hand with such force that the point of the weapon would sink several inches into a wooden target placed twenty, thirty, or more, paces away.

"Hoop-la! Hoop-la!" came through a cloud of dust. A number of vaqueros had driven a wild steer from the mountains to the race course. The picnickers looked at the animal from their safe position on the platform. Again and again the creature charged at the vaqueros, who deftly swung their horses out of harm's way.

"Send him here!" some young fellow called to one of the herdsmen.

"No, no," another cried, "send him over this way to me."

The animal pawed the earth, bellowed, and rushed around the race course in fury.

Don Pedro Zelaya climbed out on a projecting tree-branch and dropped on the animal's back, in the midst of one of its mad careenings. It stood stock still for a moment in bewilderment. Zelaya's sharp spurs soon stirred it into action. It ran, leaped, even bucked like a broncho, in trying to rid its back of the burden, but in vain.

"Brava! Brava! Señor Zelaya. Soon will you have another gentle pony."

"Let him chase thee around the race course," yelled

a youth. "One hundred pesos to fifty he catches thee!"

Zelaya found time to wave his acknowledgment of the persiflage.

The steer suddenly tried rolling over and over to free itself. The man sprang to the ground each time it dashed itself down; then, with the litheness of a cat, leaped to its back as it arose.

The animal finally gave up all efforts to throw the rider, and ran at full speed around the racing track, amidst the loud plaudits of the assembly.

Señor Zelaya drew himself back into the branches of the tree, after a little, and his mount escaped to the forest.

The men exhibited all manner of fancy riding. Some rode at the flank of a horse at gallop, or under the belly, or astride the neck. Others leaned from their saddles in flying sweep and picked up coins from the ground; or drew from the sand chickens buried to the head, yet so gentle the rider's hand that the fowl was not in the least injured.

The shadows come early in the deep cañons. The queen sent her messengers to call the people around her throne while the winners received their prizes. Abelardo Peralta announced, in her name, that after the distribution luncheon would again be served in the pavilion.

"Our queen makes Don Abelardo her chief courtier," remarked Lolita Hernandez in the hearing of a number.

"They have been friends since childhood, Señorita Lolita," returned this young lady's dueña.

Lolita laughed mirthlessly. "I fancy the captain from Madrid has offended. Perhaps her majesty saw him kissing Señora Valentino's hand this afternoon."

"Fie! Fie!" from another dueña. "He touched only the tip of that lady's fingers with his own. I saw it myself."

"Diffident soldier!" from a grave señor. "In my youth I would not have been content with so slight a token."

"Manuel! Manuel!" from his wife.

"Señora Moraga, thy husband thinks on his courtship of thee," spoke yet another dueña, laughing.

"I'm sure it looked as if the Captain kissed the stranger lady's hand," Lolita reiterated. "I'm sure too Carmelita saw it, for we were dancing in the same set when it happened."

"'Twas but a lady's favor and a man's privilege, little one," said Moraga!

"Manuel! Manuel!" again from his wife. "And before such a child as Lolita!"

"I know Carmelita favored Captain Morando above Don Abelardo the day of the dinner at her father's house. I saw it, and so did all the girls. I know she changed toward him to-day after what I—saw. I know she did."

Señora Valentino approached the group.

At almost the same moment Morando came up from the opposite direction, having been at the race course collecting from the judges their decisions as to the victors.

"Ah! Captain mine, bearest thou a word for beauty

as well as for prowess in athletics?" questioned Moraga.

"The queen has appointed no judge of beauty. Even the wisest would find bewilderment here where all are so fair," replied the gallant Morando.

"Our Captain is a diplomat," smiled the señora. She bowed to the gentleman in question; he yet lower to her.

A messenger advanced, saying with much ceremony: "Señora Valentino, the queen requests you to crown the winners from the dais. Captain Morando, you are commanded before the throne there to read your reports."

The señora curtsied. "My sovereign's will is mine."

The soldier saluted, but before he could make speech Mendoza's hand was on his shoulder. "Pardon me, friends, I have a word with the Captain."

"Morando," said the old don when they were apart, "you may not know the keen instincts of our wild animals for change in weather. Bear and mountain lion are hurrying through the forest here back to the high mountains. During the drought they have been under foot, tame as dogs. My fighting peons brought me word of this sudden activity of the animals, and just now I observed it for myself. It means the quick coming of a storm."

"Maldito! is it sure? Leagues from home are we and scores of women folk with us."

"To make doubly sure I rode my horse to the summit of a high bluff. The clouds are rolling hitherward in masses black and angry."

"What, think you, we would better do?"

"I'll order the peons to bring out the carretas and saddle the horses. 'Twill be a few minutes only. Then I'll call for silence and ask all to take conveyance or mount, speaking of imminent storm in such way as not to give unnecessary alarm. For myself, I'll lead my fighting peons; let come next the carretas; then marshal you the caballeros."

As said so was it done.

Soon all was in readiness, and the procession was tearing over the road by which it had come early in the day. Doña Carmelita had given her carreta to Señora Valentino, while she rode with her dueña. Provision was also made for Señora Barcelo, Mendoza declaring it unsafe for a woman to ride horseback under the circumstances.

As they sped along darkness overtook them. Intermittent lightning darted forked tongues across the sky, while thunder pealed and reverberated. The pent-up rain of months poured on the returning picnickers. In the dry creek-beds streams arose even while they were crossing.

The dueña's carreta was somewhat slower than the others and thus was last in the line. Morando rode by Carmelita's side.

Suddenly the heavens seemed to split. Torrents of water roared on the hillside, inundated the roadway, and poured over carretas and horsemen.

There had been a cloud-burst.

A heavy boulder whirling in the flood was flung against Morando's horse. As it fell caballeros close by

grasped bridle-rein and stirrup-strap and drew the animal to its feet. Panic-stricken it dashed wildly forward.

The lightning ceased. The dense blackness but increased the confusion.

The carretas floundered in the water. Finally, all save one fought their way to higher ground. A projecting tree-limb had struck the dueña's postilion. His horse slipped beneath him and turned with the turbulent current. Man, horses, carreta, and occupants were washed down the declivity.

The caballeros, unknowing, struggled on.

The dueña's horses soon found footing on the hillside, and taking the bits in their teeth ran headlong down grade into the deep cañon.

When Carmelita recovered consciousness she was lying in a cave, on some bear skins, near a glowing fire of logs. She could hear horses stamping and eating. Her dueña, still unconscious, was on another pile of skins.

A man came from the darkness and stood by her. He was dressed in tanned-skin shirt and trousers, and in his hand he held a sombrero. The mustached face was burned brown in the sun.

He noticed that Carmelita had opened her eyes. "Neither of you is seriously injured. I am physician enough to determine that. Rest here quietly till morning, and doubtless your friends will come. I'll have some one prepare you a hot drink now." This he spoke in Spanish. Then in English, as he turned away: "Queerest product of a spring freshet I ever saw!"

He chuckled at his own conceit.

CHAPTER VII

A NIGHT SPENT IN A CAVE

"THE drink is ready. Will I bring it to the ladies now, Cap'?"

These words awakened Doña Carmelita from a sound sleep into which she had fallen despite the discomfiture of rain-soaked clothes. The fire was burning brightly, and she found herself nearer the blaze whither some one, without awakening her, had drawn the pile of skins on which she was lying. The warmth had nearly dried her clothing.

The dueña had recovered from her swooning, and was partially sitting up endeavoring to collect her senses.

"The drink is ready, Cap'. Will you ask the ladies if they want it? I don't know a word of their lingo."

The man touched his hat in military style. The one denominated "Cap'" came up, he who had spoken to Carmelita a little previously.

"My man here has prepared some strong black coffee for you. An allowance of the native spirit you call 'aguardiente' has been added. I advise you both to drink freely of the mixture. Blankets will be provided you, and you will sleep here safe and warm till morning. Will you have the beverage now? I trust you feel not greatly any effect of the unusual experience which must have been yours."

"O!" moaned the dueña, now coming somewhat more to herself. "What a terrible happening! I expected each instant to be killed. O! where am I?"

The man laughed. "I cannot discuss what occurred to you before we found you outside this cave. Neither can I tell you where you are, for I know only in a vague way the location of the place. Let it suffice that you are safe here. Now, warm yourself with this drink and seek to sleep. The morning brings, doubtless, searchers for you."

The man who seemed the leader had been speaking in Spanish. A trace of foreign accent was in each word, though he spoke the language fluently and correctly.

The other man broke in with:

"Coffee's cooling fast, Cap'. If they don't take it now, I'll have to heat it up again all over. Kiyi that to 'em in their own lingo. Wish I knew how to."

He had been standing holding in one hand a steaming saucepan, in the other an improvised wooden tray on which were two metal goblets.

The Señorita Carmelita struggled with some difficulty to a sitting position.

"We thank you for your thoughtfulness," she said.

"The young lady says she won't have the mess—is that it, Cap'?" asked the man holding the saucepan and goblets.

Carmelita was about to reply in English, but the leader said, quickly: "Give them your preparation there, Brown. Don't be slow. They should have had it drunk by this time."

Brown complied with the order.

The woman and the girl sipped the steaming liquid.

"Now I remember," said the dueña. "We left the road just after that awful thunder clap. The water washed us down and down. Then my horses ran and ran, downhill, over rocks and gullies—O it was awful!" covering her face with her hands. "Then came the crash; and I really knew no more until this moment. Thank you, sirs, for this," sipping the black coffee. "It shall be no loss, and I will see you have ample reward. Besides, this señorita here——"

"Is the old lady saying she wants another swig?" interrupted the man holding the saucepan. "Because if she's still thirsty, there's more of this coffee and aggydenty right here," shaking the contents of the vessel, "and if this ain't plenty I can manyfactur more."

"Hush, Brown!" spoke the other. "If you have anything more to do I'll tell you."

"Just as you say," agreed the other, unperturbed.

"The crash you tell of brought my man here and myself out to where the accident met you. Your vehicle had struck a huge rock which forms one side of this cave. Needless to say the carriage was in kindling wood. You," to the dueña, "and the young lady had been thrown entirely free from the mêlée into a thick bed of dried leaves—or leaves that had been dry before the rain," this with a smile. "Your horses were floundering in the mud."

"O, my brave, beautiful horses!" exclaimed the dueña. "Where are they? O, where are they?"

"Safe here with my own horses and quietly eating

fodder as if nothing had occurred. Your Indian driver came off with a broken shoulder. He sleeps now farther along in the cave. I fancy the plentiful supply of aguardiente my man Brown gave him aided in producing his slumbers. However, I knew no other way to ease him."

"Ah, that Luis!" said the dueña. "I'll have him whipped when he recovers for thus endangering us both with his careless driving. My regular driver is away in the eastern grass ranges."

"Anything more I can do?" asked Brown. "I hear my name spoke of."

"Nothing more. I was telling the ladies you aided their injured servant to sleep by a free supply of spirits. You may go now."

"Just as you say, Cap'. Said nigger servant of the lady is a regler canal when it comes to aggydenty," commented Brown as he betook himself and saucepan away.

Carmelita and the dueña finished drinking the contents of the goblets. The man Brown soon came back with two pairs of woolen blankets.

"These blankets are finest English wool. Wrap up in 'em and you'll find yourselves warm and dry by morning. Tell 'em, Cap,' in their own talk."

"Brown, you may retire now to the inner cave and sleep."

"Just as you say, Cap'."

"I trust you will be as comfortable as the situation permits. Allow me to wish you pleasant dreams and the hope that to-morrow will find you both none the

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worse for this mishap. Good-night." The Captain bowed.

Soon the Captain was gone and the dueña and the girl were closely wrapped in the warm blankets. The fire still burned high and diffused a grateful heat. A feeling of repose crept over both the women. The storm howled and raged outside, but in their wearied state it was scarce less than a lullaby to them. Numbness came to their senses. They slept in the wild cave, safe from deluge and accident.

How long the Doña Carmelita had been sleeping she knew not. She opened her eyes. The fire had burned low. The light of the embers was struggling with the darkness. Rain and wind still held high revel on the outside. The water swished and the tempest boomed at the entrance of the cave.

Again she was sinking to slumber.

Suddenly she roused. Footsteps were near—unusual footsteps, soft as air. The fire was lower; the embers cooling; darkness lay more completely over all. Nearer the sound came. Every nerve was tense. The fire gave a feeble flicker. By the wall of the cave two figures stood not half a dozen paces from her. They disappeared suddenly. She breathed more freely. Another flicker from the fire and she saw that they were crouched low by the ground and apparently in conversation. A draft hurtled through the cavern and gave life to the dying coals. The two figures cast themselves flat on the ground. The embers died down. Carmelita waited in trepidation.

Another rift of light in answer to a current of air.

One of the prostrate figures was slowly moving toward her, as a fish floats through water without apparent movement or propulsion. Never it hastened, yet never it ceased to come, always nearer, without effort, without pausing.

She shut her teeth and clenched her hands. There was a wild desire to scream, to call for help, to fly out into the open. She did none of these things. The courage of her warrior forbears stood her in stead.

All at once the body ceased its forward motion. Then it moved backward, noiselessly, slowly. It seemed an age until it reached the other figure by the wall. The overflow of the hurricane which now came sweeping through the place invigorated the fire so that it showed the two figures standing flush against the wall and again in earnest consultation. She could tell that they were Indians, not by their dress, for that was indistinct, but by their postures and gestures. Suddenly they were prone on the ground and going, again noiselessly, toward the inner cave.

The wind ceased. The fire decreased to half a dozen separate sparks. Darkness hid the Indians from her eyes. She reached out her hand to waken the dueña, but desisted.

"Why frighten her? Doubtless they are ordinary peons seeking shelter from the storm."

After a while, through very exhaustion, she slept.

Her eyes opened wide almost with a snap and she sat bolt upright. A portion of the fire had been replenished and was flaming up. A low cry forced itself from her

lips before she recognized the one by the fire to be Brown. "What is it?" asked the girl.

The dueña awakened from heavy sleep.

"The horses—my horses," she cried, her wits still half slumbering. "The señor said they are safe. What a terrible thing—is the man still standing there? I trust his master will have the impertinent fellow whipped."

Brown felt that some unusual explanation was due from him, though he did not understand a word. Bending over, he placed his hands on his hips and spoke in a mincing way, as if to children.

"Lady, people don't need be 'fraid of Injuns. My employer's all right—good man. Injuns say much, then I fight 'em. Cap'n fight 'em—fight 'em like the devil."

He balled his right hand and doubled the arm, then patted the corded muscles approvingly with the fingers of his left. Finally he shook his fist in the direction of the inner cave while his face assumed a mock-ferocious expression.

"I suppose he is threatening his kind master. I'll have my peons beat him soudly in the morning, if the master wishes. Fellow, begone! or I'll call the one who owns you."

"Mamita, you mistake. The man is saying not to fear the Indians; that he and his Captain will protect us."

"Fear the Indians! Well, I should say not! Besides, there are no Indians here to fear, except that wretched Luis who drove my horses, and he has a broken shoul-

der, the scoundrel! If you understand this creature, child, tell him to be about his business before his master learns of his annoying us."

"Old lady's scared, hey? Scared out of her wits. Well, I reckon——"

"She is not frightened, but I was a while ago when two Indians were here and crept into the darkness, after conducting themselves in the most mysterious way." The doña spoke in excellent English.

Extreme astonishment spread over Brown's features. Then he looked as if his confidence had been painfully abused.

"Well, I swanny! Well, I swanny! If this here don't beat the deuce."

It was too much for him. His hands sought his thighs again, and he looked incredulously at the girl.

"If I do say it, this here beats the deuce!"

The man was of type the doña had never met before. However, the humor of the situation came to her and she laughed.

"The scamp is a fool, but that's nothing so unusual as to amuse you so," snapped the dueña. "I'm going to try and sleep. I'll let his master know of this. I'd have this fellow shut up on bread and water for ten days, with several whippings for good measure. Ah—h! these wet clothes. I'm glad we're safe, and the horses too."

She covered her eyes with the blanket to shut out the firelight.

"Does the old lady ketch my talk? I rather thought she saw the joke."

"She understands no English."

"Mebbe not, but I speak plain United States. It's wonderful to meet one of you folks who knows how to talk straight language."

The strangeness of the place and time did not prevent Señorita Mendoza from again being amused. "We certainly speak language—the Spanish language."

"That's what I call 'lingo,' plain 'lingo.' But that's neither here nor there. You talk American fine. Of course not as good as I do. You couldn't expect that; but I understand every word you say.

"My employer, I take it, is English," Brown went on, "but he talks my talk all right—not as I do of course. I'm glad he's wise as he is that way, for 'ceptin' him, yourself included, I haven't conversed with nobody for months. A man naturally gets just stale, homesick for folks and talking."

He seated himself comfortably by the fire, threw on a dried branch or two, then, nursing one knee with his hands clasped together, he looked at the girl. Weeks of unshaven stubble gave his face a grotesque appearance, but Carmelita had a feeling of protection in the presence and friendliness of this serving man.

"You speak of the other man as 'captain' and sometimes as 'employer.' That means he is your overseer, does it not?"

"Well," in a puzzled way, "he pays me for my time, and I do the work he cuts out for me. That there sums up the relations of me and Cap'n."

The dueña stirred in her sleep. "My horses——" she muttered, then was quiet.

"Guess the old lady ain't restin' well. P'raps she's troubled with nightmare."

"No, I think she's worrying about her horses."

"Do say! Mebbe they're all the poor creetur has."

Carmelita smiled.

"Well, anyway, I hope she's got enough over and above to buy herself another wagon."

"The lady here spoke a while ago of the other man owning you——"

"Own me!—like a nigger—not much!"

The leg he had been holding shot straight before him. Resting his palms beside him on the ground he looked at the doña in mingled amazement and indignation.

"No man owns me, Miss—I dunno your name. I'm my own boss, beholding to no one save and except Jehovah." He swept one arm widely over his head, then used it as a prop again. "If the Cap'n here should try to come it over me as master, why, decent feller that he is, I'd chuck him body and bones out into the storm right here and now. My politics is, one man is good as another if he behaves himself"—a revelation in democracy to the doña.

"I greatly appreciate your coming to tell us not to be frightened of those Indians. Likely they only took refuge from the storm, as did we."

Brown shook his head.

"I reckon they're guides to the big huntin' regions east of here somewhere. That's where we're bound for, and that's why I shipped with the Cap'n in the first place. He's death on big game. You

see," confidentially, "I'm a steamboater by profession. Up and down the Mississippi's been my trick for a dozen year. Last fall followed a flock of prairie schooners from Saint Joe to Santa Fé, largely for diversion. Met the Cap'n, and he was full of Californy and huntin' grizzlies. He wanted a man-of-all-work. I wanted a job. Here I be."

"Your life has been of great interest, I'm sure."

"Well, then, I'll continue where I left off. I was asleep when the Injuns came. They were talkin' madlike with the boss in lingo. He gave it back to 'em in lingo. They p'inted out here where you be, and I took it they were riled up about you folks. The Cap'n smoothed 'em off after a while. I strolled along to tell you some way not to be scared of the creeters, if they'd growled at you when they came in. Here I still be."

"Perhaps you wish to sleep again now."

"Not any. Horses all saddled to start. We was guided here by some Injun or other. Found everything here in plenty. Never saw anything like it. Reckon when Cap'n is through in there we'll start somewhere. He stops for no weather. I'll foller where man can lead."

Brown's flow of speech had left him talked out. He looked at the girl for a moment or two. She sat with the blanket around her and was studying him.

He finally asked:

"If I'm not infringin' on the idees you've been raised by I'd like to ask how you come to know American?"

She laughed.

"My father taught me English. I cannot remember when I did not speak it."

"Well! Your pop's Spanish, I take it."

"Yes. He learned English first when among Englishmen in the Napoleonic wars. He even commanded an English regiment for a time. After the battle of Talavera he led one of the divisions of the English army off the field, every officer above him having been cut down."

"My own pop fit in our war of 1812, about when that Napoleon was raisin' old Scat. My pop read all about it. Old gent's sixty-nine now. Born in New Hampshire was pop; mom in old Virginny. They met up in Missouria and married. Here I be, as I notified you before."

The girl did not make comment.

The fire died low. Brown was busy with his thoughts.

Three men came from within the inner cave. Carmelita lay back. The dim light showed two of them to be the Indians she had seen before, the third was Brown's employer. The Indians were plainly enraged. The other's manner was suave and appeasing. Their conversation was animated, but, for a time, no distinct word reached the girl. The heavy guttural voices of the natives contrasted strongly with the attempted soothing tones of the white man.

"Don't be skeered, miss," whispered Brown. "We won't let 'em tech ye."

"Your palaver is useless, Sir Englishman," one of the speakers said in a higher key than before. "Cash in the palm is your only argument with us." The tone

was vibrant with passion. He huddled his blanket closely around his shoulders.

Word and manner of the white man were smooth as he said: "We must not discuss it here. Let us return to the inner chamber. Some further refreshment you need before going out into the storm. Let us further consider my offer privately. These señoras——"

"Huh!" interrupted the Indian. "I care nothing if Administrator Mendoza hears me, let alone a storm-driven señora or two. The refreshment you offer is our own cache. Remember, the offer that carries weight with us is, money down."

His fellow mumbled some word of assent.

The conversation was now plainly heard by the doña.

The dueña half awakened. "Are we nearly home?" sleepily. "That Luis is a poor driver."

She slept again.

"Old lady likely is riled about all this noise when she wants to sleep," Brown remarked.

"Come back, amigos. Let us not decide thus a matter of grave importance. Come, talk further in retirement, and then make another appointment, if necessary." This from the Captain.

The Indian stamped in fury.

"Come back, you say—always come back to the other chamber. You haggle as do market-women over eggs. I know the vastness of the prize you seek. As superintendent of the Mission vessels have I sold wheat to English dogs in the north and Mexican friends in the south, so do I know of what I speak. Its coast line alone marks a thousand miles. Itself is an empire ten

times the area of your petty island. I say I am willing to help you make your own this territory, still you haggle, haggle. Huh!"

"But, my friend, we must keep these matters——"

"But, my friend—my friend!" the Indian mocked. "Men unnumbered are at my command. Still, you have only words, words, words."

"At the proper time and place——"

"The proper time and place is now and here. One hundred thousand pesos' value in your English gold notes—you claim you have the money in Monterey—place you in my hand the day the next new moon is born. Then, when you wish, my subjects in the inland—I am their king—declare Great Britain's flag to be their own, and I will hold them your loyal subjects."

Brown threw some wood on the embers. "That Injun is yelpin' back talk at the Cap'n any fool can see. I never could stand much sass from sech people myself," in an aside to Carmelita.

"Come, friend, we may not deliberate here for others to overhear. Come with me. I have your point of view——"

"Yes, or no, señor. You have my point of view, you say. Then, accept or refuse. You are not the only bidder."

"A glass of aguardiente in the inner chamber——"

"Ah! you refuse! In coming here my time was wasted. I go elsewhere."

Casting blanket away he strode toward the darkness and the downpouring rain. As he neared the fire the light showed his face clearly. It was curiously wrinkled,

not unlike a savage dog ready to bite. His companion followed him.

The leader was the dreaded Yoscolo, the craftiest Indian in the Californias, and the best educated. The other was Stanislaus, once of the Mission of San José, a man as cruel as Yoscolo, if less clever.

The doña cuddled nearer the bed as they passed.

"Hold!" cried the Captain as the Indians reached the cave entrance. "I'll accept your proposition."

They turned.

"Come back and we will arrange preliminaries within."

"Done!" said the leader. Stanislaus grunted affirmation.

A shout sounded in the open, followed by the words:

"Here is the carreta, Señor Mendoza, and footprints leading on. Have the men bring lights."

Mendoza's voice gave some order.

"Juan Antonio, you did well," he continued.

The Indians, Yoscolo and Stanislaus, vanished like wraiths.

"More Injuns, Cap'?" inquired Brown.

"Possibly. Let us go."

"And leave the ladies to be skeered to death? No, sirree! I stay."

"Please stay," requested Carmelita in English. "My father is here and will thank you."

"The women are safe, Brown. Out the other entrance of the cave. Come, I tell you."

"Just as you say, Cap'—not that I'm skeered of her pop. You lead and I'll foller."

Just as the darkness hid them Juan Antonio came into the cave. He was covered with mud. Mendoza followed on horseback. Mounted peons filled the cave entrance.

"Papacito! Papacito!" Carmelita ran toward her father.

"My child, come thou to me!" springing to the ground and clasping her in his arms.

"I'll not have such a commotion in my house," announced the dueña, returning from sleep. "It is not the hour for the fandango."

Light flared from the replenished fire.

"Why, Señor Mendoza!" now quite awake. "How did you manage to find this place on such a dark night?"

Mendoza pointed to Juan Antonio. "He followed your steps even in the darkness. To horse, at once, señora, and you too, my child. The storm abates, only to resume shortly. We must reach the main road before the rising water bars our way. Let us go. May God be thanked for your safety! How made you this fire?"

"Those who are gone built it, my father."

"When we numbered not thy carreta with the others sorrow darker than the night ruled my soul. Now is the blackness light. Hence, and quickly! To horse, all!"

In a moment the cave was alone with the fire and the shadows.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POLITICAL POT SIMMERS

"BIG game occupyin' mud houses endurin' the wet spell, be they Cap'?"

The Captain sharply drew up his bridle reins.

"Brown, are the wages I pay satisfactory to you?"

"You bet, Cap'. They're the best I've ever had. If the wages and the place didn't suit me, you'd have heard me talk long before this."

"Very well, my man. We are now entering Monterey, the capital of this province. Your sole concern there will be with preparations for further journeys according as I give you orders."

"Just as you say, Cap'," from the placid Brown. "Of course you remember I shipped with you on the proposition of big game huntin'."

The other did not reply.

The small adobe dwellings, dubbed "mud houses" by Brown, were succeeded by more pretentious ones as the riders neared the town proper. From every dooryard the prickly-pear cactus pointed its heavy oval leaves. Sweet peas rioted in tinting of sky and sunshine. The Castilian rose, blushing and demure, bowed from its stem in challenge to the hand of the passer-by.

It was the children rolling and tumbling along the muddy street who drew Brown out of his silence.

"By hicky! this here is a monstrous place for children. Just now I actually counted eighteen on one front stoop. They was in reg'lar graydashun of sizes from a foot up to five feet six inches, I should jedge." This critically.

"The province could easily support one thousand times its present population," replied the other.

Amusement and contempt struggled together on the face of honest Brown.

"One thousand times as many Injuns as is cumberin' the ground right now! By hickey! I don't think the Almighty should allow it."

They entered the large plaza around which were many of the important buildings of the capital. Here ran in full stream the life of early California. Indian women, gay in colored shawl and gown, edged their way among the fiery steeds drawing the carreta of the grandee's family. The Mexican smoking his corn-paper cigarito touched elbows with the hidalgo's son who was clad in velvet and fine linen, with inlaid gold on his hat-band and gold spur on his heels.

Skins brown, skins red, skins white intermingled. Wealth and lack of it walked side by side. There was no poverty in the California of this time.

"Well, I swanny!" from Brown. "Did you ever see such a theayter?"

The Captain alighted near a long line of low buildings. A peon came forth bowing obsequiously.

"Let this man take the horses, Brown. He will show you an eatinghouse. Remain not very far from this place until I return."

"Well, by Gosh! Left with the heathen and his flesh pots! I say, Cap'——"

The Captain was gone. Whereupon Brown followed whither the peon led him, the while speaking naïve criticisms of this worthy and of all things Californian. The Indian understood nothing, but grinned obligingly whenever he saw the stranger had completed some period or other of his discourse.

The disappearance of his "Cap'" did not disturb Brown. He had become too well accustomed to the flittings of the chief. Their place of residence was in a cañon of the high mountains, a score of miles east of the pueblo San José. Here a rude cabin had been found formerly occupied by vaquero peons. From this point the leader and his factotum sallied forth on many an excursion. If Brown wondered at the meaning of it all, he rarely questioned, and never searchingly. It sufficed that finally they would hunt "big game."

The Captain, hastening along a narrow street, came to a plaza smaller than the one he had left, but otherwise similar to it, around which were grouped many of the homes of officialdom. This plaza was the center of the fashionable as well as of the political life of the province.

He stopped before one of the most imposing residences. Within the porte-cochere a man sat on a bench. He was the outside guardian of the dwelling, a position of importance at the time.

"I wish to speak with one of the house," the Captain announced.

The other arose and bowed ceremoniously.

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Will you carry the Señora Doña Valentino word that a man is here to see her on the king's business?"

The stranger's unpretentious attire and travel-stained appearance had not deterred the guard from showing him the suave courtesy a guest should receive, but the words, "on the king's business" seemed to sting the Spanish-American.

"Señor," in grandiose manner, "I am a citizen of Mexico, an official of this household. No king and no one on the king's business is welcome where rules the republic of Mexico."

"Confound it, man! take my words to the señora. She will understand. I have no time for your heroics. Hurry up, I tell you!"

The other crossed his arms and looked disdainfully at the Captain.

"On the king's business, you say! On the king's business! Have you been asleep these many years and awakened only now? Have you——"

"Have done with your twaddle, man. I'll find somebody inside who will carry my word." He started along the porte-cochere to the front door.

"Stop! Stop! At your peril! Stay your feet, sir!"

"It's all right, Benito. I'll usher the señor to the reception room myself. Come, amigo, with me," broke in a soft voice now addressed to the Captain.

The petty official was all apologies and deep bows. The Captain paid no attention to him.

"Come, Captain, with me."

"I thank you, Señora Valentino."

"I chanced to be passing the main vestibule and saw you. Benito's patriotism was opposing your way. No?"

They were walking along a wide corridor of the mansion. Sunlight poured in through many small-paned windows. Peons, men and women, were constantly going and coming.

"This Benito's patriotism should be flogged out of his skin," was the reply.

The lady laughed. They reached a large door which she opened by pressing a spring at the side.

"His patriotism, then, is but skin deep, you think?"

She motioned the Captain to a chair. The door slammed with a metallic click. They were in a small room well lighted. Book shelves, closely filled, writing material, and desks, bespoke the library.

"I fancy this creature's patriotism would well be termed impertinence. This have I seen often enough disappear under fervent application of a riding-whip."

She looked closely at the speaker.

"Captain Farquharson," after a moment, "you have been in the Californias more months than I have weeks. Neither is this your first visit. No?"

"It is not."

Señora Valentino nodded.

"Greater opportunities for observation, decidedly, have you had than I. Still, I will say, noble señor, that the Mexicans here are vastly different from the natives of Hindustan where you have been; or even from the peasantry of southeastern Europe where, in other times, your fertile talents have found employment."

"True of the few Spaniards here, and their descendants. I cannot agree, my lady, with you as to the Mexicans. They——"

She raised a delicate, well-jeweled hand, perhaps to interrupt him; more likely, to emphasize what she had begun to say.

"My Captain, blows will never win the Mexican to favor your cause—I should say, our cause—any more than will they the Spaniard. Both have tasted here the sweets of personal liberty in no small degree. We must imbue them with a desire for the ampler freedom of Anglo-Saxon civilization, balancing thereby their love for Latin forbears; or, at least, for Latin form.

Farquharson lightly struck the desk near his chair.

"Gain the leaders, señora, gain the leaders; and we drive the others after them like sheep. Once, in Calcutta——"

"Perhaps in some province of India—never in the province of Californ ia. Bethink you, Captain! Suppose that bold spirit in the north, Mendoza, should dream your great country has here an agent purposing to do what you say. Not the years of the prophet, which he has lived, would hold him from leading his mounted peons, night and day in search of you."

"Then what, my lady?"

"Then delivering you, at the end of a lariat, to the Colonel Barcelo, my brother-in-law, owner of this house, and head of the military prison here."

The beautiful woman, leaning in her chair, placed her hand on the Captain's arm. "Now to business. Your message found me here two days ago. Of course

mine found you." She paused a moment thoughtfully, then continued:

"Colonel Barcelo returns to-night. I have planned for you to visit us this evening. You are my friend, Captain Farquharson, whom I knew in London two years ago. You are in the West for big game. Is it not so?" She laughed.

"Does Colonel Barcelo know of the wishes of my government?"

"He knows nothing. I am seeking to prepare him for such knowledge, however. To-night you may speak much or little, as you think wise."

"Señora, you spent several days at the home of Señor Mendoza after the storm. Did any word of yours sound him as to his political feelings?"

"Señor Mendoza's words on such matters come slowly. I believe his thoughts are correspondingly rapid."

"Why so, señora?"

"During my short stay in his hacienda house many young men came there. You know his daughter Carmelita is a beautiful girl."

The Captain started to speak, but smiled instead.

"These caballeros were duly presented to me. For some reason they spoke, at first casually, but, finally, earnestly, concerning the future political status of this province. I listened."

The Captain laughed. "Señora, how did you manage to get the young hidalgos talking on such a subject?"

Fie! Fie! Captain. Even a soldier diplomat

should not seek to understand a woman's ways. Let it suffice that they talked."

"Yes, yes, señora, they talked. They said——"

"Many things. A number sat or were standing around me in the reception room one evening. The wine warmed them, though they drank not intemperately. Politics rolled from their tongues.

"Spoke the handsome youth, Abelardo Peralta: 'Why wait for Mexico to drop us? Let us declare now our freedom and become a province of mighty England.' A dozen others joined in declaring for England. Señor Mendoza was listening to all this conversation, meanwhile beaming on everybody. Now he spoke for the first time. Said he: 'Since we are giving away provinces, let us go to the ballroom. The señoritas are waiting. It is the province of hearts there, and giving and taking is always in order.' Thus deftly did our wary host stem the current. Mendoza's keenness is an element not to be lightly considered."

"Was there Morando? No?" asked Captain Farquharson, falling into the manner of speech of the Spaniard.

"Yes, Morando was there. Eyes, ears, hands, feet, and heart has he for the Señorita Doña Mendoza."

The serene calm of the woman ruffled ever so little.

"Morando cannot have vented his Spanish citizenship thus soon. Doubtless easily he becomes one of us."

"I fancy it will be as says the Señorita Mendoza, who, in turn, is deeply in love with her father. Capture the gray eagle and the nest is yours."

"I suppose so. I suppose so. Why came Morando to California, do you know? Anything against him in Madrid, anything we could use to influence him here, I mean?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing." After a pause: "At Mission San José there are two men who could persuade North California for us or against us. Mind, I say 'persuade'; for, unless I mistake greatly, neither one would consent to act as bell-wether after which go willy-nilly the sheep flock."

He waited for her to go on.

"One of these two men is, of course, Señor Mendoza; the other is Padre Osuna."

"A word about the señor, my lady. I recognize the man's worth and ability, and the weight he would add to our cause; yet I do not think it wise to approach him myself."

"May I ask your reason?"

"Colonel Mendoza and I met in the old days when I was a young man."

"A young man, Captain?" archly.

"I have seen a half century of life. My meeting with Mendoza was thus wise. At Talavera the allied forces opposed the French. In a preliminary skirmish our colonel was wounded. My regiment held a position in the extreme forward center. Colonel Mendoza was hastily called from the left wing of the army, where the Spanish troops were, and was placed over us. The French began the battle by heavy cannonading. The captain of my own company, also the first and the second lieutenant, were blown to pieces before an hour. I was

third lieutenant. To save the men from annihilation, as I believed, I withdrew a little distance.

"The Spanish colonel was furious. He dashed up on his horse, ordered the company in position, subjecting me all the while to vitriolic criticism."

"What did you, Captain?"

"I replied to him. He struck me with the flat of his sword."

"And what did you then?"

"I could do nothing. We were in the face of the enemy then, as for months. Later, the allied forces were separated. A generation has lived and passed since that blood-stained day of Talavera. Mendoza, doubtless, does not remember me. Still, it would not be wise to risk injury to our cause by bringing to play any ill feeling he might possibly retain against me."

"Our Captain is judicious." Continuing: "Know you the value of these Californias?"

"They are the pivotal center of Orient and Occident. My government well knows the harbors here, their possibilities——"

The señora's raised hand stopped him. Her fingers ran along the wall searchingly. At last she pressed hard, then harder.

The wall separated at a line above her head, the lower part of the wall slowly sinking through the floor.

"I am going to show you the treasure-chamber of a dead-and-gone governor of the Californias, when the province was a part of Spain."

A room half the size of the library was in view. Stone

mortars were on the floor, and on the shelves. Resting on the brims of the vessels, and caught on the rough sides of the exteriors, were many yellow particles which dully shone in the newly-admitted light.

"Why, this is gold! gold!" touching his fingers on the edge of a jar. "These stones must once have held the ransom of a king!" pointing to the interior of one mortar after another. Amidst spider-webs and the accumulated dust of years lay thin streaks of gold-dust tracing the way from rim to bottom.

He examined an ancient broom which lay among the receptacles, gold showing among its moldy strands. "Zounds! señora. It is pure gold. I've seen it in its native state the world over."

He crossed the room. As he walked tiny nuggets of the metal which had escaped the sweepings of the old-timer grated under his feet. Fingermarks could be seen on the floor where the treasure had been scooped up by the single and double handfuls.

"Twenty years ago I was told that California's hills and valleys framed a skeleton of virgin gold. Here may be proof of it. Pray, my lady, what do you know of this? Where did the gold come from?"

She indicated some maps hanging on the walls. "These drawings show whence came the gold which once rested here."

"Yes—yes—they show—they show a river flowing from high hills—and the direction from Monterey—north of east it is. Here is the scale of miles. Why, it is not a fortnight's journey to the place. Ah!—here are signs—yes, signs—but, perdition! they are hiero-

glyphics. I can make out nothing more. Señora, how in the name of mystery did you learn of this trick-room?"

She had been standing quietly, noting with interest and some little amusement the varied activities and remarks of the Captain.

"The secret was made known to me in Spain. The one-time Spanish governor built a palace in Seville, on his home-coming from Monterey, and lived ever after as a prince. These jars supplied the wherewithal. As I heard it, he intended to return some day, on private ship, for yet vaster measure of this golden sifting which lies hidden in the California hills, but alas! too much good living and gout did not permit."

"This is wonderful—most wonderful! Somewhere in the hills there is gold, quantities of gold. Likewise, there is gold in these fertile valleys, for they smile in verdure and give promise of rich harvest a week after the drought is over. My lady, the world never dreams of the possibilities of this province."

"Clive gave India to England. May we not do even more?"

"Just so, señora, just so. Does anyone else know of this room?"

"Quite likely no one. Even Colonel Barcelo does not, his own house as it is."

"But these maps! Do you not think it singular that the owner did not most carefully preserve these talismanic signs, and take them away with him?"

"They were left here with purpose, friend of mine."

"And that purpose?"

"Oceans are stormy, distances long, buccaneers many, brave Captain."

"I do not catch your meaning, señora. Do enlighten me."

"In plain words, then: if that gold should, perchance, take wings, the whilom possessor, aided by his maps, could get another precious cargo. But if the maps, as well, should take unto themselves flight, what then? Perhaps no more of the yellow metal! So, my wise and thrifty governor-general of the province made two sets of drawings, taking the one with him, leaving the other snugly ensconced in our little treasure-chamber here," pointing whimsically about the room.

"But, my lady, how did you learn all these things?"

"This same governor-general was my late husband's grandfather. He left in cipher a description of this room, of the maps and of the mine. For more than fifty years the key to the cipher was mislaid. I chanced to come across it, six months ago, in the archives of my husband's family. The cryptogram stated that the treasure which once filled these mortars was but a hint of greater riches in the mountains."

"What a country! What a land this will be when the union jack tips the flag-pole at Monterey!"

"A country well worth the hire, Captain mine."

"You speak of Friar Lusciano Osuna. I called on him, not long since, with letters. He was ill, but very courteous. I explained a little of our work here. I take it he is a Mexican citizen."

"He is a citizen of Great Britain."

"Perhaps by some sufferance."

"By his eminent right! That government would go much farther in his protection than it would for you or for me, though we are its special agents in a great cause."

"Just the man we need, then, señora."

A knock at the door.

Noiselessly weight and spring raised the movable wall to its place.

Without was an elderly Mexican leaning rather stiffly on a cane.

"Your gringo servant has made much trouble for himself, and is now in jail," the man said to Farquharson.

"How do you know it is my servant?"

"He told me. I am under jailer. I was directed to Colonel Barcelo's, whither some said you had gone. The peons here brought me to you. Your servant, sir, getting in liquor, shot one of the officers of the guard. Now, he wishes to see you on a matter of gravest importance. Doubtless he will be executed at sunset. Will you come, señor?"

"Zounds! Adios, señora. I'll return as soon as I have settled this wretched business. I must get poor Brown out of his predicament, let come what may."

The messenger, followed by the Captain, passed out of the house. They followed the street to a narrow passage and turned into it. The supposed elderly Mexican shook himself. Away fell disguise, and the scowling face of Yoscolo was before Farquharson.

"You root-digging beast!" exclaimed the Englishman through his shut teeth. He aimed a blow with his

fist at the chieftain's head. Yoscolo ducked to one side. A blanket fell from behind over the Captain's face and shoulders. A strong embrace pinioned his arms and carried him up many stairs, his muffled shouts not sounding above the shuffle of accompanying feet.

Soon Farquharson was pushed through an entrance. Yoscolo gave quick orders in the Indian tongue. His men bound the Englishman hand and foot, and removed the blanket from his head. He found himself in a large room lighted by a lantern. Several rude benches lined the walls, while dried grass in a corner where blankets lay marked the sleeping place of Indians or of lower-class Mexicans.

"Bring a settee for the Captain," said the leader, with mock politeness. "He must be weary after his recent exertion."

His men complied.

"More comfortable now, amigo?" when Farquharson was seated. "Well, then, let's to business. I've not much time to spend with you."

Farquharson paid no attention to him.

"Perhaps you do not understand. Is it so? Well, listen now. Captain Farquharson, you promised me the value of a hundred thousand pesos in English gold notes the day the next new moon was born. That day was yesterday. The gold notes are in your hands, not mine. Your word is a lie." The Indian was speaking in very fair English.

The Captain did not reply.

"You waste my time," speaking now in Spanish. "I have much to do and cannot trifle. You have in Mon-

terey, in the hands of the English consul, the value of one hundred thousand pesos in gold notes. So you have said. Place the money in my hand and I'll turn my loyal subjects in the interior valleys to your cause. My word is true."

"Take away these cords. Allow me to go free; then, come with me to the consul's, and there we'll consider what you say."

The Indian shook his head. "Captain Farquharson never leaves this room alive unless the money is paid first."

"The British consul will not pay you the money unless I am with you."

"Fear not, Captain. I'll take chances on getting the money."

Farquharson laughed in spite of his bonds.

"Nonsense, Indian!"

"Nonsense or not, give me an order, leaving blank the name of payee; stamp it with your seal—I found it in your pocket just now—and I'll collect the money. In two hours from that time you will be free."

"I must take time to decide what I'll do."

"There is only one thing for you to do."

"Let me free, so that I may decide the more quickly."

A voice called through the door. Without replying to Farquharson, Yoscolo made a quick gesture. The others gagged the prisoner with a scarf-end, and blindfolded him with a piece of silken sash.

The door was opened. A whispered conversation followed, then he heard the heavy tread of Yoscolo descending the stairs.

The men placed the Captain on the bed.

After what appeared an interminable time the watchers ungagged him and placed food at his lips. He ate of the tortillas, or Mexican corn bread, and of the chili con carne, or stewed meat and chili peppers, which were offered. A glass of Mission wine followed.

"Amigos, I can make you rich. Loosen these ropes and come with me. Why not be free from such a master as Yoscolo, and be rich at the same time? A ship will take you and your money where he can never reach you."

The gag was hastily replaced.

The hours passed slowly. At last he fell asleep.

The leader's voice awakened him, saying: "Free his mouth and eyes."

It was done.

In the dim light he saw Yoscolo standing before him with folded arms. The others, like unblinking watchdogs, were by his side.

"Captain, will you write that order? Surely, you have had time to think now."

"It would be foolish to do as you say. Come now, release me; give some earnest of turning your San Joaquin camps to our side, then I'll pay you the money and bear no grudge against you for tying me up here."

The chieftain grunted.

"Grudge or not, white man, I'm too useful to your side for you to work out spite against me. Write that order. Write, also, a note to the consul saying you were suddenly called to Los Angeles—or any place. Date both order and note two days ago—you have been

here in this room that length of time—and you go free. I have, then, the money; you will have my support—a very happy ending to your detention."

"But see, Yoscolo——"

Yoscolo interrupted with an oath. "You shall haggle with me no more. Men, bring fire for his feet and hands. I'll make the fox come to time. Captain Farquharson, you write that order and note, or I'll torture you till you do."

A fourth Indian entered the room silently, and spoke to the leader.

Yoscolo stamped in fury. "Carrajo! Puerco! I not only have to be the brains, but the hands, in everything. What's the matter with Stanislaus? Where is he?"

"I do not know," meekly replied the messenger.

"I do not know! What *do* you know? Get out of here!"

The man disappeared, closely followed by Yoscolo.

The Indian watchers looked at Farquharson without speaking.

"Amigos——"

They placed their hands on their pistols threateningly.

"Ease the cords on my feet," he asked. "Your chief will not object to that."

Each Indian touched his lips, then dropped his hands to his pistol butt.

The sperm oil in the lantern burned low. The men extinguished the light, to replenish the oil. In a few minutes it was again burning brightly.

The astounded Indians saw Farquharson standing in

front of them, wrists and ankles free, brandishing an open clasp-knife.

They cowered away from him. He moved toward the door as fast as his benumbed limbs could take him.

Dread of Yoscolo overcame their superstitious fear. They drew their pistols, and commanded: "Hands up! Away from the door!"

Farquharson dropped his knife. He moved his arms over his head in extraordinary fashion, grimaced at the ceiling, then moved slowly toward his jailers. Flirting his fingers ominously at them, he exclaimed in sepulchral tones: "Winky, wanky, wunky, fum! Winky, wanky, wunky, fum!"

Despite the pain in his ankles he executed a miniature war-dance on the floor, again solemnly uttering: "Winky, wanky, wunky, fum!"

The Indians moved back from him, again overcome by his "big medicine." In one of his eccentric movements he managed to knock over the lantern, the oil running out over the floor. They snorted in terror, and began some incantation.

Farquharson found the door and started downstairs. His feet refused further action. He fell and slid down to a landing.

The Indians heard the fall. There was a colloquy and a rush across the floor.

The Captain attempted to crawl to the next flight of stairs, but he could move but slowly.

The Indians opened the door.

"Light the lantern," called one.

A voice could be heard in the street: "Have ye seen

the Cap'n? O, I say, have ye seen the Cap'n? Durn ye, can't ye understand American?" Then, in a louder tone: "I say, have any of you dum fools seen the Cap'n? Don't ye know anything in this 'ere country?" Finally, still louder: "*Have any of you durned niggers seen the Cap'n?*"

It was Brown searching for his employer, and trying by strength of his lungs to make up for lack of knowledge in his hearers.

"Brown! Brown!" yelled Farquharson. "Come here quick!"

"Where be ye, Cap'?" from the delighted Brown.

"Here! Up the stairs! Quick!"

Finding the stairs was not a difficult matter, and up came Brown, three steps at a time, shouting again: "Where be ye, Cap'?"

The light through a begrimed window showed the helpless Englishman on the landing.

"Well, I swanny!" wondered Brown.

"Get me to the street. Be quick! The Indians will come."

Fear of Yoscolo gave spirit to the aborigines. They rushed down the stairs, one of them holding the lantern which they had taken time to refill and light. "Hands up!" they commanded in Spanish, presenting their weapons. "Hands up! or we'll shoot."

Brown seized one of the men by waist and neck and hurled him at the other. "O, talk United States!" he shouted.

The Indians fell headlong. Brown lifted the Captain to his shoulder and flew down the stairs. Several pistol

shots missed aim, but no pursuit was attempted. Brown's performance probably looked like more "big medicine" to the Indians.

Soon the rescuer and his burden were outside.

"I've carried many a pig, Cap', but never down so many stairs to wunst. Where be ye hurt?"

"I'm better now. I think I can walk if you help me."

Brown assisted him along the way.

"Where were ye, Cap'? As near as I can jedge they're searchin' the whole country for ye."

"The men you saw were holding me captive."

"Well, I swanny!" from the disgusted serving-man. "Held by a pack o' niggers! I never could stand much of that sort o' thing myself from sech critters."

Directly they were away from danger, with the life of Monterey flowing smoothly around them.

CHAPTER IX

SEÑORA VALENTINO SEEKS TO INTEREST PADRE OSUNA

THE courtyard of Señor Mendoza's hacienda house was glorious in light. Patterns of Oriental network were reflected from lanterns clustered along the eaves, strung on improvised archways, or undulating from the lofty flagpole. Genial spring rejoiced everywhere, no less in rare exotic floating in miniature lakes than in the countless blooming flower species that were at home in this Eden-land. The soft air breathed content as it moved in low voice around giant palm and high-branching walnut. As the evening waxed the zephyr became a whisper, then sank to sleep on the fairy scene with a sigh as faint as the rustle of a leaf.

The courtyard gate lay open wide. Many of the fairest and of the bravest in California were to pass within after the day had ceased, to fare forth against the rebirth of another sun. Mendoza's welcome to the late-coming rains took the form of pleasure-making for the gentry of the countryside. Neither thought, nor labor, nor expense had been spared that this might be a festal night long remembered in Alta California.

The lord of the manor sat in his private library.

"A visitor, Señor Mendoza," announced a peon.

"It is who?"

"The Padre Lusciano Osuna."

"Show him here. No—wait. I'll attend him from the front myself."

A moment later the señor was at the padre's side. "Welcome, reverend sir. This house is happy that your feet press its threshold." Mendoza bowed in Castilian grace, then extended his hand to the priest, who accepted it in courteous grasp.

"And you are well, Padre?"

"Good health blesses me, Señor Mendoza. How makes it with you?"

"Well. Very well, indeed. Come with me, Señor Padre."

"I thank you."

"Padre Osuna," as they sat together shortly after, "it pleases me that opportunity comes to thank you for sending your major-domo, Juan Antonio, that night the storm broke, to trace my daughter and her dueña. I have sought you each day since, only to find you were still in Santa Cruz. A father's heart thanks you, sir."

"A pastor's solicitude for one of his flock deserves not thanks, Señor Mendoza."

"May I ask, reverend sir, why you brought so strong a fighting force to meet us that night? Juan Antonio told me it was your order, but held his counsel further."

"He knew nothing more. Early that afternoon there came a peon, fugitive from the renegade camp. After much hesitation, so greatly are Yoscolo and Stanislaus feared by the Indians, he told me he had seen the two leaders traveling, no men with them, in the direction of

your merienda ground. I cautioned him to silence lest panic sweep over the Mission. Marshaling bowmen and carbineers, I mounted horse to come to your aid, should the miscreants gather force and give any trouble. Thus I rode to you in the thunderstorm, having dispatched couriers posthaste to the pueblo for further aid from the soldiery there."

"The pueblo soldiers were already scouring the Los Gatos hills near Santa Cruz for the ubiquitous Indian leaders," said Señor Mendoza, "word having come in from that region that an attack was imminent. A messenger from the pueblo met us in the foothills not long before you came. With him rode away Captain Morando, to join his men and their lieutenant, my fighting peons accompanying him. We rested our horses. A rapid count of carretas by lantern light discovered the absence of my daughter and the señora dueña. At that moment you came, reverend padre."

The priest bowed. "I greatly regret that a sudden recurrence of illness prevented me from going farther with you that night. I tarried home till Juan Antonio came through the driving rain with news of the lost ones' safety. Strength soon returning, I went on my way to Santa Clara and farther."

"You set out at midnight, in the howling storm?"

"Yes, Señor Mendoza. Duty called me."

"That is the reply of a soldier, Padre Osuna."

"I am a soldier of the cross, señor."

"Well said! Well said! good sir."

"Allow me to explain, señor, why I have thus come to you when you are about to open your festivities. Less

than an hour ago I returned from my journey. A messenger from Monterey was at the Mission bearing written words from the representative of England there. The message stated that an English citizen disappeared two days ago in the capital city. He left the home of Colonel Barcelo that afternoon and no one has seen him since. Much anxiety is felt over his absence."

A peon appeared in the doorway. "Colonel Barcelo and lady, with Señora Valentino, await you, Señor Mendoza. The Colonel asks a moment's private interview."

"Excuse me for a short time, reverend padre?"

Before Mendoza could depart the Colonel came bustling in.

"Heard your voice, my friend, and couldn't stand on ceremony. Have you received the news? Most interesting it is. Well, the governor has resigned and I am made acting-governor of the province pending the new appointment. The former governor is still in Mexico City. Fussy old curmudgeon he is. Should have resigned years ago. What I want to know, Señor Mendoza, is, are you laying plans to capture the office? If you are not, I am sure of getting it, as sure of it as if it was in my pocket here," tapping his breast-pocket vigorously. "What say you, Mendoza?" slapping the señor's shoulder with heavy palm.

"I have pledged myself to remain administrator while the need lasts," replied Mendoza, glancing at the friar. "The need yet exists, and I cannot hold two offices."

"Splendid! Splendid!" exulted Barcelo. "I'll take my

chances against the other aspirants, and you may be assured there will be enough of them."

The Padre Lusciano Osuna had arisen. The exuberant Colonel now noticed him for the first time.

"Reverend sir, my obeisance! Kindly do not repeat what I have said of my political hopes."

Osuna bowed and smiled. "As you wish, sir."

At that moment Señora Barcelo and his sister entered.

"My husband is irrepressible. He actually bubbles over like a mineral spring. He requests a private interview, then shouts his secrets from the housetops. Reverend padre, I'm delighted to see you well again. Delighted! How pleasant to meet you on such an occasion as this! Reverend Padre Osuna, my sister, Señora Valentino, very lately from Spain. She was with us the night you led those men to us in the rain. No time for introductions then, of course. Ugh! what an experience!"

The friar and Señora Valentino acknowledged the introduction.

"Yes, yes, Señor Padre," exclaimed Barcelo, "what rag-and-bobtail followed you that night! But it's the way with Indians. They run as children after anything that promises excitement. How like wet-dogs-on-horseback they looked. Poor Mendoza here quite lost his head when his daughter's carreta turned up missing. Lucky I was there. Why, just send your Indians back-trail in such a case and they can find anything."

The Colonel looked around in a self-satisfied way.

"Why, husband," said Señora Barcelo, "how you

do talk! As I say, you are so irrepressible! It always seems you are nowhere but just in the front of everything."

"Quite the place for a soldier, señora, quite the place."

Here Mendoza interposed. "Señoras and señors, will you not be seated?"

"Certainly," replied Barcelo. "Certainly."

"Colonel Barcelo, may I ask you if anything has been heard of the Englishman who two days ago disappeared in Monterey City?" said Señor Mendoza.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the stentorian Colonel. "Why, ha! ha! ha! I should say something has been heard of the fellow. He walked into my house half an hour before I left with some cock-and-bull story of having been kidnaped. Kidnaped! Ha! ha! ha! Good!"

The Colonel arose and stood before the others. "Let me give you my theory of the affair," self-complacency shining on his rotund face.

"Husband, some other time. The guests are surely arriving and Señor Mendoza wishes to be occupied with them."

"Patience, good wife, patience. My dear, if you have a fault in the world it is that you talk too much. Now—let me see where was I when interrupted. O, yes! The Englishman's disappearance. The explanation is a simple one."

The Colonel looked meaningly at his auditors. "Just too much aguardiente—native brandy. It's most deceptive stuff for a new beginner. I once had the same experience in Paris with absinthe."

"Why, Crisostimo, you never told me! How dare you speak of such a thing?" Señora Barcelo bridling.

"It was nothing, Clarinda, nothing, my love. Merely something that might happen to anyone—anyone of investigating mind, I mean, of course. Well, this Englishman——"

"O, Crisostimo, when were you in Paris and drank so much absinthe? It's simply disgraceful how we poor women are deceived. I'm going home to my uncle in Spain."

"It was years ago, my love, years ago, long before I met you. I was a lieutenant then in the Spanish army. Well, we were speaking of the affair in Monterey. I say——"

"The less you say the better," from his wife, tartly.

"My dear, how can you fill the position of governor's wife if you possess such small pride!"

The words had magic effect. The señora mopped her eyes with a dainty lace kerchief, and in a moment was all smiles. Her husband almost swaggered with suppressed importance.

"This Englishman was simply drunk. Let me tell you the whole case," this time without interruption. "The man called on my sister-in-law, Señora Valentino, a very young woman, as you see."

Señora Valentino lowered her eyes in appropriate recognition for the remark.

"I mean she is inexperienced in the world's ways, has always been protected, led a sheltered life, and all that. Well, this man she met occasionally in London some time ago called on her at my house in Monterey. The

fellow was simply drunk, and this poor lady, in her simplicity, could see nothing of it. Why, the house guardian met him at my front door, and he began talking nonsense about kings and so on. Think of this! to a stranger too!

"Well, the fellow gained entrance through my sister-in-law. Seems to have behaved while within. Soon came a crony, some old pot-fellow, on a mock errand, and away went the two to carouse again. Then, the Englishman was lost. A hue and cry was raised. The inefficient town police do nothing. Then I make it a military matter, and, behold! the lost one comes walking to my house with a ready story to tell. Thus, the kidnaping. Ha! ha! ha!"

Barcelo subsided into a chair and looked around for approving words.

"How penetrating you men of affairs are!" This from Señora Valentino.

"As the Englishman has made his appearance my anxiety concerning him is over," remarked the padre.

"Certainly! Certainly!" observed Barcelo. "No cause for alarm. The man was taken by drink and cooked up a story to suit the case."

"How clever the Colonel, my brother-in-law, is!" again from Señora Valentino.

"With his work as comandante and the added duties of acting-governor, I cannot see how he will have time to turn," said his wife, admiringly.

The friar laughed gently, Mendoza, more loudly.

"From the viewpoint of a simple mission-administrator I can appreciate what such double work must mean.

I trust the Englishman will be more wary in the future against kidnapers, that you may not be further burdened from that quarter at least."

Barcelo winked knowingly. "Brandy overnight usually leaves headache in the morning. The man must be a seasoned drunkard, for when I saw him there was no sign of his debauch. Of course he has now learned the strength of our native product, and I hope will govern himself accordingly."

The serving peons with respectful insistence were knocking at the door. The guests were coming in numbers.

The Señora Mendoza came into the room, curtsied to the company, then said to her father, "Papacito, many seek thee."

"Yes, yes, my child."

"The child is right," said Barcelo. "Señor Mendoza, your place is with your arriving company. Come, señoras, let us forth to the grounds. It is known that I am here. Many will be looking for me." Then in a confidential aside to Mendoza: "Will you write a letter to the secretary of state in Mexico City setting forth my qualifications for the governorship? State what you know for and against," with an air of great frankness.

"I'll do as you ask, Colonel." Turning to the friar: "Now, Señor Padre, we will resume. The guests will be well attended without my ministrations for the present."

Padre Osuna placed a small package in his hand. "This is the jesuit bark you brought me in my recent

illness. I could not accept it from you as Administrator Mendoza, highly as I esteem the qualities of character which led you to bring it to me. From Señor Mendoza I should have greatly valued the favor."

The other bowed understandingly. "Still I cannot separate Señor Mendoza from Administrator Mendoza."

"Let it then be so. Adios, Señor Mendoza," and the friar stepped into the corridor.

Everywhere was the hum of voices and echoes of laughter. Bursts of music sounded from various parts of the house or grounds where musicians had been stationed.

Many salutations from the California gentry met the priest as he passed along. Just outside the outer gate a hand was laid softly on his arm.

"May I have a few words with Padre Osuna?"

It was the Señora Valentino. The light made splendid play on her gown and jewels. The woman was young and fair, as well as exquisitely clad, but all this seemed to be put away as she stood beside the dull-robed friar.

"Certainly, Señora Valentino. If you thus request, my time is at your disposal."

"Here is a bench near the gatekeeper's lodge. Will you sit here awhile, reverend father?"

The padre seated himself by the woman's side.

"Perhaps I should yet further introduce myself to you. My husband, the late Colonel Clodio Valentino, was cousin-german to your mother, daughter of Ambassador Altamira, of Castile."

The friar looked keenly at his companion. "I have

not seen my mother in ten years. She spoke often of Clodio Valentino, colonel of the Royal Hussars, and of his wife. It would seem as if the lady must be much older than you, señora."

"I am the Colonel's second wife. We were married seven years ago."

"I see."

"Padre Osuna, you can be of wonderful service to the great kingdom of which you are a citizen. In so doing you fulfill a duty to your state and to this province of California."

"Kindly explain, señora."

"California is as a ripe apple ready to drop into a basket. It oscillates to and fro. Great Britain holds one basket; the United States of America, another. Russia, with a third basket, stands at a distance. Mexico is the tree which must lose the apple in any case. Reverend padre, you have the length and strength of arm so to shake the tree that the Great Britain basket catches the apple."

"Why should I do so, if I could?"

"The United States looks eagerly on this province. That colossal nation reaches now to the Gulf of Mexico on the south, and it seeks to make the Pacific Ocean its boundary on the west. A continent-wide dominion is its aim."

"Señora Valentino, I live secluded from the world, and do not wish to share in its politics."

"But politics can affect the welfare of your spiritual children. Call to mind the secularization of your missions by the Mexican government. That was a po-

litical act, yet it cut the nerve of your Order's religious enterprise in this part of the world. Is it not so?"

"I believe that it is. Yet our Order once built here a Christian community from wandering savages, and our heart has not lost zeal, nor our hand willingness."

"I rejoice with you in all that, reverend father, but it was done when the flag of considerate Spain waved here, and the work of the church was deemed paramount. That flag has departed forever. Why not, then, seek another protector for Missions and for province which will make void the inconsiderate work of Mexico, and which will not be second to Spain, in good endeavor?"

"Señora, when rumors of change float in the air I close the windows and doors of my soul to all, that I may give myself unstinted to the work among God's untutored children."

"Why not safeguard the temporal and spiritual rights of your Indians? Ah! padre, think of India over which England is suzerain. There the amplest freedom is not only allowed but guaranteed to each native cult; neither does anyone hear of sequestration of church property."

"It is the truth. English rule and justice walk with equal pace in India."

"England would not do less in California for our church." In her enthusiasm she leaned toward him, her brown eyes flashing. "Else comes the United States. Her armed ships patrol our coast, sounding, always sounding, for deep and shallow water, though the coastline of this province was charted long before

the United States of America was born. Why hazard the contingencies of American government, when the weight of her little finger, did she so wish, could be heavier than was the whole hand of Mexico? I, as a child of the church, ask you this. From my present home in an official family in Monterey I can read the signs of the time. Padre Osuna, we must act, and quickly."

"Another has spoken to me somewhat of this."

"That other was Captain Farquharson? No?"

The padre did not reply.

"The Captain seeks to bring California from unsatisfactory Mexico to stable and safe England. Señor Padre, for the good of souls, the souls of the Indians you love, help him!"

The Franciscan sprang to his feet, his figure erect and his face radiant.

"But, Misericordia! what can I do!" sinking back into his seat.

"Ah, humble friar! You have the power of a Savonarola who threw the wicked, bloody city of Florence to her praying knees. Have I not heard you in the cathedral in Seville, and again in Barcelona? Did not the soldiers draw strong cordons at the great cathedral in Madrid when you spoke there, lest the surging crowd crush themselves at the entrance? Ah, mighty one! speak to the people of this province, tell them of England and of her benevolent sway. Lift your voice for your country's good. Instruct and persuade, as you alone can, priest of the golden tongue! Then, listen, and from your hearers will come cheers for the mistress

of the seas and her kindly rule. If you are silent, your church and your state lose much because a man marvelously gifted failed in manifest duty."

"I hold the call of duty supreme."

"You used that as a text for one of your sermons in Seville."

"Why do you connect me with that preacher in the cathedrals?"

"Because you are the same man, though you now wear a beard and write but a portion of your former name."

"Señora Valentino, that I am here under my present name is approved by my conscience and by my superiors."

"I doubt not, good padre."

The priest looked fixedly at the flag gently waving high above their heads.

"Padre, the good of souls! The welfare of your Order! Your Indian wards!"

"I know—I know."

They arose.

He saluted and turned to go. Then he hesitated. "My will is that of my superior."

He walked away a few steps, paused, and stood facing her, with:

" 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.' My children of the wilderness cry unto me—unto me."

Making the sign of the cross, he continued slowly down the road.

The joy of triumph shone in the señora's smile.

CHAPTER X

THE BEGINNING OF THE BALL AT SEÑOR MENDOZA'S HACIENDA HOUSE

IF taste and industry had been used in decorating the exterior of Señor Mendoza's mansion for the great ballroom function, the interior gave evidence of no lack of these same qualities.

The artistic spirit of the Latin is to the manner born, and the early Californian developed his inheritance by daily communings with the beauties of earth, and air, and sky. Mendoza, moreover, had seen the wonder spots from Paris to Madrid and Vienna; and the fruits of his experience had ripened and mellowed in the years of wealth and leisure he had spent on his estate at Mission San José.

For smaller parties he had reception room, dining room and dancing hall finished in the oak that his own forests furnished, peons having skillfully hewed the wood, then, under the master's directions, polishing the grain until the markings stood out prominently.

It was the ballroom used for the baile—large party—that showed the resource of California and the cleverness of Mendoza at the best. This room, reaching the length of one side of the house, was built in redwood, of which California is sole producer.

Mammoth trees, grown on the mountains near Santa Cruz, had been felled and split from end to end. The exposed sections were trimmed and smoothed, showing, in many a curious layer of etching, the centuries these monarchs had lived. Oxen by the score and Indians by the hundreds had been engaged for months in bringing to Mission San José these timbers which, placed side by side, made the walls and ceiling of the apartment.

"Of the many wood grains," Mendoza often said, "I prefer the redwood for broad effects. The convolutions run in ampler curve and build themselves readily into large dimensions."

The room was looking its best to-night. Chandeliers, fed by sperm-oil, gave subdued light through delicately tinted shades. Candles branched from the walls, playing their softened brightness everywhere. The reddish wood glistened and showed in strong relief the story of its years.

In the corners were grouped potted plants and flowers and shrubs. Radiant bougainvilleas and flaunting hibiscus were side by side with delicate maidenhair ferns modestly featuring the mossy rocks on which they first saw life.

Rare orchids from Japan, grown robust in the kindlier air of California, strove to surpass in beauty their indigenous relatives. Poinsettias, vivid in their tintings, stood unabashed with the modest lily of the valley and the shrinking violet. The California poppy, lover of both hill and lowland, drooped its head and half folded its petals, diffident in the presence of the grandees of the floral kingdom.

The guests had not yet come into the ballroom. The reception rooms, dressing rooms, and the wide grounds still held them. The señoritas, with hair flowing over their shoulders, and clad in silken skirt and train, with bodice, also silken, close-fitting and high-necked, were not yet ready for the dance. The señoras, near their charges, were chatting away the time.

The men strolled about smoking their cigaritos, passing a word here, a jest there, until the music should call them. Their dress was that of the Spanish cavalier of the time. From their shoulders fell the poncho—long cape—made of beaver from Peru. Later in the evening this garment would be removed, showing old and young in velvet knee-pants, deer-skin leggins beautifully stamped and broidered, and with shoes of polished leather held by golden clasps.

The coat, likewise of imported beaver, reached only to the girth, and was ornamented on arms and shoulders with silver and gold thread.

Around their waists were draped bright-colored silken sashes, the ends long and sweeping. A white linen shirt, elaborately fluted and sparkling with diamonds, completed their evening dress. Men and women were lavish in their display of jewels.

Glorious, splendid California was worthily represented by her sons and daughters the night of Señor Mendoza's fiesta.

In the garden a young man in the uniform of an army officer was speaking with a girl.

"Señorita Doña Carmelita, a dance with you on the

ballroom floor; another sit I with you in the open. Is it not so?"

"Señor, the Captain Morando, I promised you a mazurka, nothing more."

"Truly, señorita, but when sitting one finds words to speak the thoughts that rise in the heart while flying feet are pursuing the spirit of the dance."

"As hostess I may not deny the petition of a guest."

"O, Señorita Doña! I speak not as a guest to a hostess. I am at your feet ever, as a subject to a queen. May I not pay a vassal's homage to you? With many caballeros you tread the dance, never granting further favor. May I not be the exception?"

The señorita and the Captain were standing under a big palm. Seeing her cross the courtyard he had hastened to intercept her.

She drew away.

"Since the Señor Captain frees me from my obligation as hostess I will tell him he is well stocked in presumption."

In a moment the shadows lost the girl.

The young man was disconsolate. He buckled his sword-belt tightly, then loosened it. Pulling his laced cap lower on his forehead he moved aimlessly about.

A laugh called him to himself. In the semilight near the ballroom entrance stood the Señorita Mendoza. Michief sparkled in her eyes.

"Señor the Captain, are you playing blind-man's-buff with yourself?"

"O, señorita mia, only a game of solitaire."

"A game of solitaire!" rippled Carmelita. "What

a diversion for a ball! Señor Comandante, it is not permitted here."

A bevy of laughing young women came to the door.

"Lucinda, come, and Alfreda, and all you girls," called Carmelita. "I have here a caballero captain who needs our attention. Señoritas doñas, come quickly."

Directly they were all fluttering around Morando.

Fathers, mothers, and dueñas paused in their conversation.

"The soldier is captive," from Señora Morage. "Let us see how the children deal with him."

"The captive is little worried," commented Señor Zelaya.

"As art thou, Pedro," said Higuera. "Thou hast thirty years and no wife. Thy heart should worry thee."

The señoritas led the Captain into the ballroom, and halted under one of the chandeliers.

"Will the Captain have gifts of gold and silver? Does the incense of friendship delight him?" asked Doña Carmelita.

"Pleasant questions from a fair questioner, senorita."

"Yes or no, Señor Captain," chorused the señoritas.

"Yes, emphatically."

A score of eggshells, filled with bits of silver and golden paper, were broken on his head and uniform. Not until the little baskets, expeditiously handed the girls by peonas, were empty did the bombardment cease.

Those looking on laughed and applauded.

"Brava! Brava! Captain," some one cried. "You are courageous."

"Yes, yes, and calm in this baptism of fire," from another.

"To a mirror! Let Captain Morando take view of the new uniform given him by the señoritas," a third.

Young and old sportively crowded around Morando and pushed him in front of a long glass. He was spangled from head to foot with white and yellow sheen, all gorgeous over the dark background of his uniform.

"A speech! A speech! Some word of thanks!" insisted the company.

Silence was not easily found in that care-free gathering. Finally Morando could be heard.

"Señoritas, and all my friends, I am happy to wear the colors that speak of sunrise. It is a double pleasure to receive such rare insignia from hands the fairest in the land."

"A good word, Captain! A good word!" exclaimed Abelardo Peralta. "Not all your vigils are spent at the shrine of war.

Señor Mendoza entered. "The musicians are idle. Motionless the feet of señorita and caballero. Why no dancing?"

"The goddess of wealth has listened to Captain Morando," informed Pedro Zelaya. "The sweet odor of his gratefulness floats around. The rest of us wonder and envy."

"Captain, turn the tables," from Mendoza. "Let not the señoritas bear all before them." To a peona, "Naomi, bring more eggs."

The eggs were passed around by dainty basketfuls

to the young men who singled out their lady-loves and generously bespangled them with the confetti which, moist from scented waters, clung where it fell.

The señoritas, hair down their backs, flitted about like iridescent butterflies. Neither were they idle in egg-breaking. Demurely they would divert a caballero's attention, then quickly break a shell on his hair, coat or vest.

The men soon shone in colors as resplendent as those of the señoritas.

Perfume filled the air.

Mendoza signaled the musicians. The opening notes of the grand march sounded. The egg-breaking ceased.

Señor Mendoza and his daughter led the march. Dance after dance followed in quick succession.

"The merriment tempts not my son of late," said Señora Zelaya. "He is over in that corner talking politics with men a decade his senior. It is politics, always politics, with him now."

"Relations strain between Mexico and the United States of America. If there comes a break, California must be affected. Your son, Señora Zelaya, and all good Californians, each day are searching carefully the political horizon."

Colonel Barcelo came to them with heavy step.

"I hear, Moraga, you play a clever hand at cribbage. I haven't met my match at that since I've been in California. Come to the card room with me and try this thing out. What say?"

"I'm at your disposal, Colonel, but distrust comes to

me when I think of contesting my small knowledge of the game against your undoubted excellence."

"I'll tell you over the cards of the players I've bested in Europe. Let us go now."

"Colonel Barcelo," from Señora Moraga, "are we likely to have war?"

"Señora, you are not the tenth, nor even the twentieth, who has come up and asked me that question this evening."

The portly Colonel extended his chest. "Now, I cannot, of course, speak of private or official information. No man, no real man, you understand, in my position would do so. But I will say that the combined position of comandante and acting governor-general gives me rare opportunities to become acquainted with the exact state of affairs. You understand me, of course, señora."

"Yes," rather faintly from Señora Moraga.

"Well, where was I when interrupted? O yes. This question of war. I'll simply say no force—no force, mind you—could ever take Monterey, the capital. Our swivel guns at the castle rake sea- and land-approach. We are absolutely impregnable."

"But the rest of us—of the country outside the capital?" again ventured Señora Moraga.

"No enemy of sense would care a feather for a country if the capital could not be taken. In other words, we are another Gibraltar. Come, Moraga, I always make it a practice to say as little as possible on these subjects to the señoras. They are easily alarmed. To the card room let us go, Moraga."

The men departed.

"May I serve you a mint lemonade?" asked Morando of Carmelita when the music had stopped.

She was willing.

A peon brought the refreshing drink.

He bent over the girl, carefully anticipating her each want.

"Señorita Doña, the sugar? and more lemon juice? Good! Now a spoon."

"Forget not yourself, Señor Comandante."

Soon he too was served.

"Señorita Doña, may I speak to you? I cannot refrain."

She smiled at him over the edge of her glass. "It seems to me you have been speaking to me for some time. The thoughts are bubbling up which the dance set free, as you said in the garden a while ago. Is it not so?" She laughed.

The Captain signaled a passing peona who removed the emptied goblets.

"Señorita Carmelita, pray take my words seriously. I think of you, and I dream of you. Your image is enshrined in my heart. Before it I do homage. O, Señorita Doña, I offer you the best devotion of a soldier whose greatest hope is to love and to cherish you, and to make you happy. Will you not listen?"

She blushed and her hands trembled slightly.

"Speak to me, Doña. Bid me hope, even ever so little. The endeavor of my life shall be to become worthy of you. Will you not say there is hope for me?"

Intensity blazed in the eyes of the handsome soldier,

and gave resonance to his voice. He took the girl's hand. She but half resisted.

The settee which they occupied was partly screened by palms from the rest of the ballroom. A bevy of señoritas, passing through during the intermission, exchanged knowing glances as they came in sight of the two, and went on. The man and woman did not notice them.

"O, Carmelita, will you not answer me when I say I love you? and tell me in return that you love me? Will you not, Carmelita mia?"

She did not try to withdraw her hand. Her eyelids drooped, and the color of the rose swam anew in her cheeks.

"O, Carmelita, beloved of my heart, say you love me," rapturously.

"Sorry to interrupt you, but music for the waltz has begun, and I have the honor to be your partner."

It was Patricio Martinez, who bore Carmelita away with him to the waiting dance.

Morando spoke in a low tone to her: "I'll see you again presently. May I not?"

It was not easy for him to see her again soon. The young gallants crowded around her begging for dances, or pressing their favors on her during the rest times.

Morando danced several times, then left the ballroom and wandered through the reception rooms, joining a group of men who were discussing the possibilities of wheat-raising in the Santa Clara Valley; then, another coterie who debated the relative merits of Alta Califor-

nia and Baja California. Finally, he became one of a company gathered around Señora Valentino.

"We change location, but not scenes," she said to him. "One might well fancy himself in Madrid to-night instead of Mission San José."

"It is so, señora."

After a little Morando continued wandering, until he came to the conservatory where he sat down.

"I'll remain here till Carmelita is disengaged," was his thought. "She almost listened to me. If she accepts me, I'll be the happiest man in the world."

He spoke half aloud.

"Your voice, Señor Capitan, tells me you are here. Otherwise, I might have missed you. What a cozy retreat you have amid these branching ferns!"

It was Señora Valentino.

The Captain's full height bowed to the lady.

"Will you not be seated, señora? Pardon me for not seeing you sooner."

"The pardon is yours. Will you not, also, be seated?" making room for him at her side.

"I thank you. The favor of your company honors me greatly."

The señora inclined her head. The gems in her hair gleamed responsively to the bright lights. The white silk of her gown lay softly against the vivid green of the ferns.

"Señor Capitan, I am impelled to come and talk with you."

"My dear lady, I am honored."

"I wish to make appeal to you."

She looked straight into the man's eyes.

"Señora Valentino, if I can do anything for you, I am thereby most happy."

"Many thanks, Señor Soldier. I shall begin."

Morando was all attention.

"Señor Capitan, the traditions, the art, the faith of Spain live very near to my heart. They have made old Spain glorious. The world's history would be vastly poorer without them."

"Truly, señora."

"This province, even now, is smiling under their influence. The future has splendid things in store for us here if the heritage from across the sea has way unimpeded. May there not be another Castile beside this Western coast only less magnificent than the first?"

"Señora Valentino, you give my own thoughts."

"I rejoice, Señor Capitan. But on whom rests the duty of safeguarding this heritage? Is it not on us, the sons and daughters of Castile?"

"Most unquestionably, señora."

"Then, let us exert ourselves. Political unrest is agitating the people. It is as yet formless, but soon it must flow in settled stream, for men's thoughts, like water, always seek their level. Señor Soldier, the part of every lover of Castile is plain."

"Please say further, señora."

"Mexico and California soon go their separate ways. Is it not so?"

"I think it is."

"The world moves, Captain Morando, and California must move with it. Whither do we go?"

Without waiting for reply she went on: "Public opinion can be so molded that it will take us to the protection of either the United States of America or to Great Britain. Great Britain would willingly let flourish here Spanish ideals. Read the history of her dependencies. Captain Morando, our obligations to Spain, to this province, to ourselves, demand that we lead the people to ask the coming of the British flag."

"Señora Valentino, many are speaking of these matters. The necessity for some action is forcing itself. But the United States lies nearest us. Their government is republican, the same in form as that to which the people here are accustomed."

"Ah! Capitan. I have been in the capital of the United States with my attaché husband. Two years ago what did I hear? It was a question of Texas coming into their Union. Even the great ones said, 'Let us drive the Mexicans and Spaniards across the Rio Grande, then to perdition!'"

Morando did not speak.

"They would not deal differently with us in California. Let come the United States and all vestige of Spanish civilization will be obliterated, and another foreign to it will be installed. Great Britain would be our protector. Why chance the coming of disaster?"

"Señora, you have thought wondrously deep."

"Why not act, and act now? Public sentiment is in pliable condition. Who knows how long it will so continue? Do your part, Señor Soldier, in organizing a

general desire that our province seek Great Britain's friendly arm. Spanish chivalry calls to you."

"You speak strongly."

"Not more strongly than the occasion demands. The welfare of this province, the faith of our fathers, the culture of centuries, are at stake. The United States of America is awake. That mighty nation has her agents among our people, persuading them, leading them, exhorting them. Señor Soldier, be up and doing."

"Señora, come what may, I shall not fail this province."

He touched the hilt of his sword.

"The splendid womanhood of California will crown you their knight, my soldier."

They arose and walked away. In the doorway they paused.

"For Castile and this province!" she said.

"By my sword and glove, señora!"

She extended her hand. He met it in firm grasp.

The call for supper had been made, but they had not heard.

The company was around them.

"Ah, Captain! Ah, señora! what have we here? a betrothal?"

Carmelita Mendoza, with her father, was but a pace away.

"Friends, friends, to the supper room!" called the host.

The guests obeyed.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE SUPPER

"MY friends, nature prepares a generous harvest against the months of winter. Let us enjoy the good things at table in anticipation of our share of that harvest. Amigos, to our seats!"

Thus spoke Mendoza to the company assembled in the dining hall.

This room was a little smaller than the ballroom, and its finish was of polished oak combined with redwood. The tables ran nearly the length of the apartment.

The products of Mendoza's gardens and hothouses had been levied on to furnish adornment. Cut roses tumbled in profusion from vases arranged along the middle of the tables, while potted palms cast shadows from chandeliers and wall-candles. Ivy shaped itself into an archway over the entrance, crept through the foliage of house shrubs lining the walls, and intertwined here and there into bowers of ease. Against the green vine, flowers, rivaling the rainbow in tints, sang in color notes the jubilation of California's spring.

The people enjoyed the midnight supper. The cooling air of the courtyard, the dance, the animated conversation had whetted the appetites to an edge.

Finding place not in any particular order, but in the

company their preference sought, as was the way in these large gatherings, the girls, with their dueñas, and the gallants were mostly at one end of the room, leaving the graver portion of the assembly by itself.

Señor Mendoza was at the head of a table. At its foot was his daughter. Near him was the wisdom of the valley, represented by the heads of families. Morando wished to seat himself at the señorita's right hand, but she had already motioned Abelardo Peralta to that place. On her left was Alfreda Castro.

The soldier found himself next to young Peralta, and directly opposite Señora Valentino.

"I have a budding magnolia by my plate," burst out Lolita Hernandez. "My partner shall wear it for a button-hole bouquet. He lacks only that. Come, I'll put it on you."

The youth by her side was nothing loth.

"Señorita Doña," spoke her dueña, who was on the other side, "what can you mean? A nosegay so large emulates the cabbage. Why not use this Castilian rose? Behold, it blushes for you," laughing.

"Señora Doña, even a cabbage in Señorita Hernandez's hands would thereby become beautiful," from the youth.

"How easily young men's tongues frame compliments!" from the dueña.

"They have worthy subjects here," from another youth, waving his hand toward the señoritas.

The dueña laughed again. "Young people are unmanageable these days," she concluded.

"Señor the Capitan Morando did not enjoy the egg-breaking?" inquired young Peralta.

"We enjoyed it," laughed Lolita without waiting for Morando's reply.

"I broke an egg on your hair, señorita. I see the gold and silver adornment still," rallied Peralta.

"I broke three on your vest, Señor Peralta. I'm sorry you could not have preserved the pattern," returned Lolita.

"But the Señor Capitan and the egg-breaking—was it new to you?" continued Don Abelardo.

"It was unexpected to me here, but not new," from Morando. "Spain observes it on such occasions as this."

"Ask the Señor Capitan about heart-breaking," laughed the ungovernable Lolita. "Perhaps he has practiced that too in Spain."

"Señorita Doña Hernandez!" warningly from her dueña.

"Well, I am as curious to know about that as was Don Abelardo about egg-breaking."

"Practice makes perfect, is that your meaning?" smiled Señora Valentino at her.

"Yes—no. I simply asked for information."

"Is the Señorita Hernandez still heart-whole?" inquired the soldier. "If she is not, it is not the fault of my sex, I know."

"Do you speak from the fullness of experience, Señor Capitan?" asked Señorita Mendoza. Those in hearing laughed gayly at the quip, as did Morando. Nevertheless, an arctic breath seemed to touch him.

The elders gave themselves to other subjects—the grain and the vineyard prospects for the year, the re-

turn of their herds from the San Joaquin, and the like.

Colonel Barcelo's voice was heard talking over his contest at cribbage with Moraga.

The serving peons finished their work and were standing idly by the door. The guests had eaten their fill. The room rang with merriment. Many of the señoritas had woven flowers from the tables into wreaths and were wearing them on the head or around the neck. Lolita Hernandez wished to crown her partner with roses, but the youth, with mock humility, demurred.

"Thrice did even the great Cæsar refuse a crown," he exclaimed.

"Listen to the lore of the traveler," laughed Peralta.

The other had just returned from a year at college in Honolulu. "The fourth offer I might accept," he said.

Lolita promptly placed the wreath on his head. "I crown you king of heartbreakers," but looking at Morando.

"I salute the king," proclaimed the Captain.

"Whom shall I crown queen of heart-breakers?" Lolita went on.

"Crown yourself," from her partner. "Señorita, the honor should be yours."

"Hush!" in pretended severity.

"All hearts fall before you," sweeping his arm toward the company. "Crown yourself; nay, I'll crown you."

He removed the garland from his own head and attempted to place it on Lolita's. She resisted. The señoritas and the gallants laughed and cheered loudly. Finally she took it from his hand and held it aloft.

"I appeal to the company here present; who is the queen of heart-breakers? This crown is looking for a wearer."

"Alfreda Castro! Carmelita Mendoza! Ysobel Soto! Señora Valentino!" came from the crowd.

"The Señora Valentino should have it. She has overcome the Captain Morando. 'Sword and glove' has he surrendered to her. It was at the door of the supper room. I saw it. Señora Valentino, the wreath is mine."

"Señorita Doña Hernandez!" remonstrated her dueña. "Remember the señora is not a maid as art thou. Have care for thy tongue."

Lolita started toward Señora Valentino.

"Come back, Señorita Lolita," from the dueña.

Lolita partly turned, but Señora Valentino was laughing, in evident enjoyment of the fun. Reassured, the girl called to the company:

"Shall it not be the señora?"

"The Señora Valentino!" they cried. "Our fair guest from Spain! Honor her! Crown her queen of heart-breakers!"

The señora smiled sweetly at the joyous throng, as much at home in the frolic as anyone among them.

Lolita placed the wreath on the señora's head. "As thy friends acclaim, so I do. You are pronounced queen of heart-breakers."

What reply the señora made could not be heard for the applause, but she kissed first one hand, then the other, to the señoritas and the caballeros.

Mendoza was standing by his place at the table. He

motioned again and again for silence before it was obtained. Finally they listened to him.

"To the ballroom for you youngsters! Come with me."

"Will you stay with us in the ballroom, señor? We want you," laughed a girl.

"I'll start you going in the dance, then return to the table. We elders like to linger a while over our coffee and burnt brandy. But come now, children."

They followed him through the green archway into the ballroom.

When the señor had left the supper room, taking the younger contingent with him, the others had moved toward his end of the table. Barcelo insisted that Moraga should at once accompany him to the card room; whereupon rather reluctantly Moraga left his old friends.

Marcel Hernandez arose to his feet.

"Fellow rancheros, and your ladies," bowing gallantly, "Señor Mendoza, occupied with the young people, is temporarily absent from the room—he is quite a boy, is the señor—and I take occasion to say a word to you. The old government here is worn out, ready to fall to pieces like a used-up carreta. We, the leaders of the people, must find another government—find another; yes, and soon. We have talked it over this evening; in fact, have talked of little else for weeks and months. Let us take action to-night."

He sat down deliberately.

A half dozen men sprang to their feet. All dignity was thrown aside, and they raised their voices and gesticulated earnestly.

"It is not yet the time," called one.

"It is the time, and——"

Another drowned him out by shouting, "Let us seek adequate protection from some great nation which will insure us life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"Mexico falls soon before the United States. We shall be declared contraband of war and suffer the consequences, unless we act quickly and in the right direction," asserted yet another.

Don Louis Valencia arose.

"Friends, you speak wisely. Nothing more need be said. Let us act. I say, make our province a dependency of Great Britain. That country will protect us. Señors, now is the time. Great Britain will be our ally and friend. I repeat, take action—and *now!*" thumping his fist on the table.

Señor Mendoza returned from the ballroom at that moment. He went to his chair at the table. All became silent.

They waited for him to speak on the matter which was occupying so much attention in California. The stillness became intense.

"Neighbors and friends," Mendoza said at last, "what I heard as I entered tells me the import of the debate which evidently took place while I was absent. I hope nothing will come to head at present."

"It must come to head!" from Hernandez. "Why not take the bull by the horns?" looking at Higuera. "I mean, why not take initiative here and now? It is unsafe to wait."

Valencia seconded Hernandez's words.

"The wise traveler," counseled Mendoza, "surveys an unknown way rood by rood. Señor Hernandez and friends, before taking positive action we should consider the path along which we would find ourselves."

"It is either the United States or England," argued Valencia. "No other nation need be considered. Why not declare for one or the other before another day?"

"Quite right, neighbor Valencia, quite right!" supported Hernandez.

"The rest of the province is undecided, as we have been. We now know our minds. Let us speak them. The others will follow, and the vexed question is at an end," again from Valencia.

"But do we know our minds well enough to speak them?" questioned Mendoza.

"We do! We do!" replied Valencia.

"Huzza! Huzza!" shouted Hernandez.

"Better consider!" cautioned Higuera.

"Slowness never wins the race," retorted Valencia.

"The tortoise won the race from the hare," rebutted Higuera.

The dancing had not held all those who had gone with Señor Mendoza to the ballroom. The atmosphere around the table of the elders was surcharged with subtle influence which drew many back. By twos and threes they came. Señora Valentino and Abelardo Peralta were among them; Captain Morando also.

"Prepare to become an English province," now from young Peralta.

Not a few were of that conviction. "England is just.

England allows her dependencies to flourish in their own way," they declared.

"Huzza! Huzza!" again shouted Hernandez. "Viva England!"

Morando arose.

"I make no preference save this," he said. "We must preserve here Spanish ideals, Spanish manhood and womanhood."

"Excellent!" commended the host. "Splendid!"

"Splendid!" echoed Señora Valentino, clapping her hands.

The women followed her example. "Yes, yes, Spanish manhood and womanhood!" they exclaimed.

The Señorita Carmelita came to her father's chair.

"Papacito, the time soon comes for El Son. We await you in the ballroom."

"At once, little one."

The elders left the table, and the entire company moved toward the door.

"For Castilian manhood and womanhood in this province!" Señora Valentino said to Morando.

"Sword and glove!" enthusiastically in return.

Again their palms met in compact.

For the second time that evening Carmelita saw the fervent hand-clasp.

CHAPTER XII

CARMELITA DANCES EL SON

BY custom the dance of El Son followed supper. Peons pared wax from candles and scattered the particles over the ballroom floor. Smooth as it had been before it must be made more so for the dance El Son. The Indian men and women worked the wax into the wood until the surface shone like the beams of a harvest moon.

"A little more wax by you there, Clotilda—not that side, the other!" ordered the peon in charge. "Now, be alive with your foot. Use judgment! Use judgment! Don't wear a hole in the floor. Now, more wax where your toes were digging!"

"Already as many candles are in the shavings, Tomaso, as would make a display for Holy Thursday," remonstrated a peona.

"What have we here? What have we here?" indignantly from Tomaso. "All masters, and no servants? Obey my word, and be quick about it! Move yourselves, every one of you! Make the floor glisten. The more it shines the more slippery it is. Did you not hear some of the company clamoring that our doña herself dance El Son to-night?"

Tomaso was Señor Mendoza's trusty man, an Indian

of intelligence and fidelity. He was captain of the Señor's fighting peons and had been Carmelita's postilion at the merienda race. Under his rapid orders the servants made the floor ready. Mendoza, however, was not satisfied with it.

"The floor is not yet right for El Son. It needs a dance thereon. Friends, let us have a waltz!"

The caballeros sought partners, looking for their lady loves over grounds, reception rooms, and conservatory. Morando found Carmelita chatting vivaciously in the midst of a gay party.

"Will you favor me with this waltz, señorita doña?"

"It is yours, Captain Morando."

In a moment they were one of a hundred couples on the floor. The girl's eyes sparkled and the color rose higher in her cheeks.

"A wonderful night this has been!" Morando exclaimed to his partner in the waltz. "What a pity it must end so soon!"

"You are, then, enjoying the baile? No? It will delight my father, I know, to hear that."

"Señorita Doña, may I have a few moments with you when this dance is over?"

"Certainly."

In a little while they were seated in the quiet of a reception room.

"Señorita Carmelita, I told you earlier in the evening that I love you, and I asked your love in return. Again I tell you I love you. O, doña mia! Doña mia! Will you not accept my love?"

She looked at him and moved away slightly.

"O, Doña Carmelita, will you not answer me?"

"The Capitan Morando is insistent."

"My heart urges me, señorita doña, my heart filled with love for you."

"The Capitan's love hangs on slender thread."

"You, doña mia, can make that thread strong."

"I do not choose thus to occupy myself."

"O, heart of my heart, accept my love and I will give my whole life to you."

"It is quite time for this interview to end. Señor Capitan, will you escort me back to the company?"

"Señorita Carmelita, why do you speak in this way? Have I offended you?"

"Possibly you have other questions to ask."

"Only one other question concerns me, señorita mia. Answer me that, I implore of you. Say that you will accept my love."

He stood before her. Involuntarily his hand dropped to the hilt of his sword, as it had done when shortly before he had been speaking to Señora Valentino.

The girl arose quickly. "Good evening, Captain Morando," she said and left the room.

Undecided, he looked after her.

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Señor Captain, we meet after El Son in the card room. Come into the open with us, and we will explain."

It was Valencia who spoke.

"Yes, come with us. We have been looking everywhere for you," joined in Hernandez.

"I am at your service, señors."

The music for El Son, low and sobbing, came floating

through the flower-scented air. This dance, of Spanish, or, perhaps, of Moorish origin, had elaborated itself in the new world, personifying in poetry of motion the joyous spirit of the province. It belonged to the master of the house to select the dancer who, if she chose, might add to the usual figures inventions of her own. Carmelita appeared at the entrance of the ballroom. Serving maids and Indian messenger boys were around her in numbers. She dispatched them, one by one, to bring in all the guests.

They came from everywhere. The older men were in small groups, talking earnestly, and often gesticulating vehemently. The young men were mostly with their sweethearts and the dueñas. With Señora Valentino were Valencia, Hernandez, Abelardo Peralta, Patricio Martinez, and a half dozen others, including Morando.

"We have laid before the Captain our point of view," Hernandez was saying. "Even the charming Señora Valentino, a stranger here and altogether free from self-interest, agrees——"

They passed into the ballroom.

Señor Mendoza walked up and down the room, pretending to clap his hands before this señorita, or that, this being the signal by which the favored one was notified that she was to set foot to the measures. Laughter and bantering without stint went around.

"Lolita Hernandez!"

"Lucinda Higuera!"

"Tula Laynez!"

"Juanita Calderon!"

"Alfreda Castro!" from yet another partisan; and so on.

"The Señorita Carmelita!" cried a dozen voices as the doña entered.

"Beautiful! Beautiful!" exclaimed the usually phlegmatic Fulgencio Higuera. "The señorita Mendoza has stolen the light of stars for her eyes, and she has robbed the gardens for her cheeks. Let her dance El Son."

She bowed in appreciation.

"I thank you," she said. Then to her father, "Papacito, a word."

They withdrew.

"Will you ask me to dance El Son?"

Wondrously beautiful she was, her dark eyes glowing, the color flaming in her cheeks. The chivalry of his young manhood lived again as he saw the resplendent girl. Joy leaped in his heart that this exquisite creature was his daughter. She stood before him, every element of her personality pleading.

"Please, Papacito! I wish it to-night more than anything else."

They walked back among the people. The company unwittingly seconded her request.

"The Señorita Mendoza, the fairest of the fair! Call her, señor! Call her, the lily of the valley!"

The old don hesitated.

Again came the request from all sides, increasing insistent.

"Papacito, please!" urged the girl in low voice.

He clapped his hands before her.

In the midst of loud applause she walked to the middle of the room.

The music, now dreamy and insinuating, soon took a livelier turn. The young woman glided back and forth on the waxed floor as lightly as a swallow skims the air. In willowy movements, hands and feet in perfect correspondence, she hovered over the cleared space, seeming scarcely to touch the floor. Then, in wider step, she circled over this space in eaglelike sweeps, her arms outstretched and her long hair floating.

Without pausing, the girl's movements became sinuous, gentle. She advanced, retreated, again came forward, as if entreating, but fearing rebuff. Rare grace and charm was in every motion.

"Brava! Brava!" shouted the men, while above all was heard the excited voice of Morando.

With arms extended she fluttered from side to side, as a butterfly sipping honey from flower-cups here and there, staying but an instant at any one.

Her hand made gesture to the musicians.

The strain became bold, quick, martial.

She spun on her toe-tips, her long dress billowing, her hair streaming. As she whirled, her feet described winding figures on the floor, her skirts repeating the design.

More and more quickly Carmelita circled over the room.

Louder crashed the music, and more hearty became the plaudits.

Fulgencio Higuera drew from his pocket a handful of gold pieces, and flung them at the señorita's feet. Another, another, a dozen others, followed his example.

"Brava! Brava!" cried Marcel Hernandez, tossing handfuls of gold to the ceiling. The pieces fell among the enthusiastic company, who scarcely noticed the glittering shower.

Still, the doña sped on her toes, her skirt still marking in ampler pattern the lines fashioned by her feet. Her very being undulated in response to the weird music.

The applause hushed for a moment.

"C-A-R-M-E-L-I-T-A M-E-N-D-O-Z-A," some one spelled the tracing, letter by letter. "Carmelita Mendoza."

The clamor broke out afresh.

"She has worked her name on the ballroom floor, as part of the dance! Viva! Viva!" they shouted. "Viva! Viva!"

The doña again fluttered up and down, arms outstretched.

The caballeros rushed around the girl shouting and praising her. More gold was freely scattered, its jingle intermingling with the orchestra.

"Splendid! Splendid! Is it not so, Señora Valentino?" came from Captain Morando. Without pausing for reply he hastened to Carmelita, who was surrounded by numberless congratulating friends.

"O, doña mia," the Captain cried, "you dance with the grace of an angel."

"The most successful rendition of El Son in a decade!" added a dueña.

"The most perfect ever," again from Morando.

Señora Valentino came up all smiles. "This ball is

he rarest treat of my visit to California, and your
l Son, señorita, is the choice incident of the evening's
leasure. I thank you for it."

"You are very good, señora. I am glad that I can
elp in entertaining you."

The music for a mazurka was beginning. The older
nen disappeared from the room. Morando, Peralta,
Martinez, and a number of others soon followed, while
he rest were again at the dance.

Colonel Barcelo and Moraga returned to the card
oom and finished their nearly completed round of crib-
age.

"A piece of luck, Moraga. Simply a confounded
iece of luck. It happens occasionally."

"I've won five out of six games from you to-night,
Colonel."

"Chance threw the cards your way. My skill simply
vent for nothing—went for nothing!"

The card room rapidly filled. After a few moments
of cursory conversation there was silence. Each was
waiting for another to speak.

Valencia began.

"Señors," with much deliberation, "at supper the
sense of the majority of the assemblage was that we
ake our province from the tutelage of Mexico to the
rotection of Great Britain. The question before us
s, How shall we proceed to make this transfer? Let
us hear from you."

Hernandez arose.

"Send a delegation to the English representative in
Monterey, and tell him of our desires. A British fleet

is near. Let it take possession of the province. Then, if Mexico objects, she will have Great Britain to deal with."

Most of the men nodded affirmatively.

Hernandez took his seat with a satisfied air.

"Friends," said Mendoza, "I am not of the mind that it is wise to take action in this matter to-night. Too great haste in acting is like a too hot fire in cooking."

Higuera, Zelaya, and a few others signified they were in agreement with this.

"My friends, action is the word!" cried Hernandez. "Positive action! Prompt action! Mexico stands at our gates collecting taxes, giving nothing in return, like the robbers at Tarifa. Drop Mexico, I say, and join hands with England, at once!"

"As English subjects a mighty future is ours. Let us not wait," from Abelardo Peralta.

"The young men will have opportunities then," followed Miguel Soto. "An English prime minister ruled his political world when he was twenty-one."

"Why not find from the United States, and from Great Britain as well, the conditions under which they will receive our province? We can then act more intelligently.

"No, no!" chorused many. "England! England! Become English subjects at once."

Hernandez jumped to his feet. "Become British subjects at once!" waving his hand.

Others, and yet others, followed his example, till the place fairly rang with the shouting.

Mendoza rapped on a table. After quiet was restored he began: "Señors, we have in Baja California men like Carillo and the brothers Pico. Unless we allow them a part in our deliberations they will repudiate any action we may take. England does not want a province with divided sentiment. Carillo and the brothers Pico are capable of inciting Southern California to rebellion, if we attempt to turn over the province to England without consulting them."

"Good friends, no embarrassment need be feared from Carillo, nor from the brothers Pico." With these words Señora Valentino floated into the room, her upturned face wreathed in smiles.

The company, surprised at the sound of her voice, turned questioningly.

"I think Carillo, likewise the brothers Pico, can be relied on to espouse your wish to transfer allegiance to England."

Mendoza spoke: "Respected lady, these absent gentlemen must be given a chance to speak for themselves. Giving away provinces is more than child's play. We cannot hazard guesses."

"My ever-wise Administrator, you are right. It occurs to me that these same brothers Pico and Señor Carillo have in some slight manner expressed themselves as favorable to this English protectorate which we all are so anxious to bring about."

"But, good señora, mere hearsay must not be accepted."

"Again, right as ever, most worthy Administrator. But, to recollect further—I believe I have in my pos-

session a letter from these señors—possibly, two or three letters—as I recall the matter more closely. These same letters, if I mistake not, declare quite plainly as to the sentiments of the writers."

"But, Señora Valentino, there must be no possibility of mistake in such an issue as this."

With childlike simplicity she looked into the face of Mendoza.

"I remember fully now. These Southerners express unequivocally their desire to make California a British province. They assure us they will spare no pains to bring about this consummation."

"But, señora, pardon: would I presume should I ask further enlightenment?"

Again she smiled. "Señor, your Excellency, you do not presume. These communications from Señors Carillo and the Pico brothers were merely little private scribbles, from one sojourner to another, so to speak, and in which there happened to be mention of the political unrest now occupying the minds of the sterner sex." Her smile broadened.

Colonel Barcelo had been looking through the cards of the last hand at cribbage, hoping to come across errors in his opponent's play. He found none. "This question should have been settled long ago," he said, testily. "Let the British admiral bring his fleet into Monterey Harbor. Down comes the Mexican flag and up goes the Union Jack. Mexico cannot resist, having no ships. I wonder I did not think of having this done before."

He took his seat, and again looked through the cards.

Renewed enthusiasm now possessed the company. hey applauded and shouted; and cheered Señora alentino and Colonel Barcelo. When quiet came a mmittee was chosen to acquaint the English repre- ntative at Monterey of California's wish.

"Come, Moraga," challenged Colonel Barcelo, "let s play again."

"Colonel, you would pass a province from hand to and as unconcernedly as you do these pasteboards," tered Moraga, taking his place at the card table.

"Certainly! Certainly! This change has really been my mind some time. Just crept in, so I hardly oticed it."

The Colonel and the land baron were soon engrossed ith the game. The other guests sauntered away.

A few moments later Carmelita chanced to see 'omaso, captain of her father's fighting peons, riding way on Mercurio, the wheel horse in the merienda race. 'ollowing, on a reata, was the big bay leader of the Mendoza team. The Indian had stripped to the waist, nd wore only the leathern knee breeches of the peon ockey. A handkerchief was tied tightly around the ead to keep in place his long hair. Neither horse was addled, having only a surcingle about its body.

The rattle of hoofs on the hard road sounded loud n the night, then died out.

The girl knew that Tomaso was bent on some errand f great interest to her father. The two swift horses, prepared as they were, meant that the Indian would, f necessary, ride one to exhaustion, then use the other o complete his journey.

The night waned. Noises of early morning began to echo in the hills. The dance and merriment went on. Faint tracings of dawn came across the eastern horizon. The Mendoza ball was drawing to its close. Light came on wings of morning.

Peons brought carreta and horse. Señor Mendoza and his daughter stood at the courtyard gate to wish Godspeed to the departing guests. "Adios, Señor Mendoza! Adios, Señorita Mendoza!" was heard on every side.

Father and daughter watched neighbor and friend go their way.

Rapidly galloping horses were approaching from the direction of the eastern hills. Two horsemen were soon at the gate. One was Tomaso astride the big bay leader trembling from the ride. The other was O'Donnell on his stallion.

"Buenos días, Señor O'Donnell," greeted Mendoza.

O'Donnell returned, "Good morning," adding with rising reflection, "Well?"

"The Señor O'Donnell and I have pressing business, my daughter. Please excuse us, carita mia."

The señorita bowed.

The men went into Mendoza's private office.

CHAPTER XIII

RETURNING FROM THE BALL

"MY Captain, it has been a goodly night, one long to be remembered."

Señora Valentino and Captain Morando were riding along the rolling highway which led southerly from the Mission San José. A large portion of the company that had attended the ball traveled this same road, the men on their mounts, the women-folks mostly in carretas, though two or three, like Señora Valentino, preferred horseback.

"Our Mendoza is a lavish host. He does nothing by halves, like the worthy Californian that he is."

"Ah! yes. A wonderful man! A wonderful man!"

The señora reined in her horse. A rabbit, pursued by a hawk, was running toward them from the undergrush at the side. Double and dodge as it might, the little beast could not rid itself of its persecutor. Finally it lay, a little crumpled heap, not far from the señorita's horse, squealing for mercy. It found none, for the bird of prey drove its talons into the fur and started to carry away its victim.

The señora swung her horse in wide curve and struck the hawk with her riding-whip. It dropped the rabbit and flew fiercely at her. She struck it again, this time

with the butt of the whip. It circled away, but returned to the attack and was hovering over the lady when Morando killed it with a pistol shot.

It was the occurrence of a moment; but the angry challenge of the hawk and the report of the firearm called the attention of the horseback riders as well as the dozing occupants of the carretas. Men shouted and women screamed. The peon riflemen came hurrying up, ready for battle.

"Señora, are you hurt?" solicitously inquired Morando.

"Nothing much. A little scratch."

"Let us dismount. You are pale. Let me assist you."

She gave him her uninjured hand and loosed her feet from the stirrup. Twilight fell across her eyes, resolving into huge, unsteady clouds swimming around and around her with increasing velocity. In dead faint she sank into Morando's arms.

The Captain removed the señora's long riding-glove, and found her wrist profusely bleeding from a small, but deep, perforation. The hawk had driven its talon in, full length.

"Come, amigos," Morando cried, "prepare a temporary couch for Señora Valentino by the roadside."

A dozen ponchos fell from caballeros' shoulders, and the women improvised a comfortable bed from them on the thickly interwoven green grass, the soldier holding the insensible woman in his arms the while. He laid her, still fainting, on the bed, softly odorous of the growing things about.

In tiny pulsings the blood flowed, reddening her light-lored riding-habit, and spattering the costly fabric the ponchos.

The Captain bound his handkerchief tightly around r arm midway between wrist and elbow. The bleeding ased.

"Señors, who among you has a flask of aguardiente?"

Several were offered.

"Will one of the ladies bathe her face and forehead th the liquor?"

Señora Higuera did the service.

Morando was tightly bandaging the injured mem-r with strips torn from handkerchiefs when the atient opened her eyes.

"My arm feels asleep, Don Alfredo," she murmured. Where am I?"

"With your friends, and safe," replied Morando.

Color gradually came into her face and lips. Her reath no longer fluttered.

"O, the poor little fellow so wanted to save his life at I couldn't see him lose it," she murmured. "The awk passed blow for blow with me. His talon pricked rough my glove."

Word of the mishap had gone to Señor and Señora arcelo, who were riding in the vanguard of the pro-ession. The complaining of the Barcelo carreta ingled with the puffing of the Colonel's horse as the wo raced back.

"O, Silvia! Silvia! What dreadful thing has hap-ened?" wailed Señora Barcelo.

"What has happened is over, sister mine. Thanks

to our friends here, and Captain Morando in particular, I am nothing the worse."

"Doubtless! Doubtless! How clumsy your arm looks tied up that way! Well, a peon reported you stricken down by an attacking eagle. How about it?" inquired Barcelo.

Señora Valentino quickly detailed the story.

"Humph! A pretty state of affairs! Come, shall we be going? Matters of great importance wait my arrival at the capitol."

"There is no reason to wait. I am able to travel. Amigos, adelante!" playfully waving her hand toward the south.

Riders and carretas set out, Señora Valentino moving slowly, the soldier by her side. The Colonel, making sure all was well with his sister-in-law, insisted on traveling at full speed. His wife's carreta plunged and squeaked and rolled after him.

"My dear," called Señora Higuera, in a little while, "you are growing pale again. Stay with us at Aguas Calientes until you feel stronger. We'll send a peon messenger on a swift horse, to reach your sister with explanations. Come, Señora Valentino, we are at the turn of the road."

"I fear, señora, your arm is swelling. It will be better to dismount at the Higuera hacienda house and have the wound carefully bathed in warm water," counseled Morando.

The house of the Higueras was but a few hundred paces from the road, but Señora Valentino was able to negotiate the distance only with greatest difficulty.

The señora's wrist had swelled considerably. Morando removed a small portion of the riding-glove driven in by the bird's claw. Good wife Higuera bathed the wound in warm water, after which a soothing lotion of herbs diminished the pain greatly.

"Come," said Señora Valentino, rising from the couch whither Morando had carried her, "it is time for me to be going."

"Impossible, my lady," remonstrated Higuera. "My house and all in it are at your disposal. Rest to-day. Last night was a gay one, but a merry night means a weary morning. To-morrow, or the day after, you can continue your way. A proper guard will attend you. Besides, your arm may require further treatment. We have an Indian woman on the hacienda who is only less skillful than the Captain," bowing to Morando.

"Thank you, amigos. My sister rests at the Calderon hacienda, near San José pueblo. I can easily reach there in an hour. The scratch on my arm is nothing. I am ashamed of having shown weakness over it. Misericordia! am I sugar that I melt if a cupful of water reaches me?"

Despite all protestations she insisted on starting forth.

"Take a carreta, my dear heart," urged Señora Higuera. "Come, we'll fill the body of the vehicle with blankets and have all as soft as down for you. What differs an hour more or less in the journey if you can be more comfortable? Let me make ready for you."

The señora would not listen to it. She mounted her horse gracefully, despite her bandaged arm, waved

Free Libr
San Jose,

adios to the Higueras, and set out toward San José attended by Captain Morando.

"Be sure to stop if you feel weak," called Señora Higuera. "A peon will make his house yours, as well will any ranchero."

"Never fear, good friends; I have strength and to spare for the journey."

The rest of the merrymakers were well ahead. The señora and the Captain rode alone over a virgin meadow. Mountain and valley smiled. The sun, giving promise of a perfect day, crystallized his light in myriad dewdrops hanging on flower petal and grass leaf. The morning breeze carried the sweet voices of the hill blooms as they sang in fragrance. Mingled with it was the pungent tang of wild mustard bursting into gold. Great stretches of wild oats eddied and billowed away, an emerald sea meeting the outposts of the coast range; or, dropping across the valley, lost itself in the misty, opalescent sky line. High aloft the lark was warbling his joy of living. The blackbird in the meadows trilled love songs to his mate.

The man and woman turned their horses and looked along the way they had come. The San Francisco Bay reached in silvery arc to the horizon. The great white buildings of the Mendoza hacienda, stippled with the gray of peon dwellings, rested against the hills. Stray cattle and horses made their way body-deep in the luxuriant grass-growth, while the mountains echoed the bleating of the Mission's sheep. It was a picture of pastoral California, rich and splendid.

The lady showed no trace of her accident of an hour

efore. Color was in her face and animation in her nes as she said: "Captain Morando, let us look our ll on this scene. The future will see a panorama here ss wild, less beautiful, perhaps, but of greater useful- ess." She turned her horse again southward.

Morando rode by her side, not speaking for several oments. Finally: "Señora, you have deep interest in hese Californias."

"You have said it, señor Captain. I have, indeed, a eep interest in the province." As he said nothing she ontinued: "I have a kindred interest in the 'province ff hearts' here also—to quote our host."

He laughed.

"Really, Captain, it would not surprise me if Señor Mendoza's ball brought about half a dozen weddings. The setting for love-making was exquisite. It might have been fashioned after some fairy scene, so delicately were light and color blended, with that delicious music of the natives permeating it all. Madrid would have gone wild over it! Even the most watchful mamma and duena felt the spell and laughed and looked away while some fair one allowed the brave Don Juan to hold her hand and murmur nothings to her. Why, even señoritas and young sparks betrothed in childhood by their parents yielded to the passion divine, as if their love was at first sight." She laughed gently.

"Was it so? I am too little acquainted with the families of Alta California to know of the young men and women so engaged."

The señora's laugh was now merry, as she replied: "I sit much with the old wives and know all the gossip.

I can tell you all about it. There are Patricio Martinez and Alfredo Castro. Their families intermarried in Spain before the new world was thought of, continued in intermarriage in Mexico, and will not desist in California. Then, there are Lucinda Higuera and Aviel Soto; Lolita Hernandez and young Julius Belden—part gringo he is, as they term it here—and—and—yes, Tula Rosa and Pancho Laynez."

"I suppose there is the history of a family tree connected with each of these betrothals!"

"There surely is. I actually ache down to the tips of my fingers," holding up her injured hand, "trying to remember it all. But come," checking her horse sharply, in sudden remembrance, "there was one account most interesting, or, rather, more interesting, even, than others. Who was it that told me? I think, Señora Valdez, or, perhaps, Señora Sanchez. No, it must have been the very aged Señora Hernandez, Don Marcel's mother."

"My interest is aroused almost beyond bounds," he laughed.

She returned the laugh. "Well, whoever it was that told me, I remember the story. It relates to our host of last night, Señor Mendoza, and Señor Peralta, father of that splendid young cavalier, Don Abelardo.

The soldier's interest was now aroused in earnest.

"The friendship of Mendoza and of the Señor Peralta, so the story goes, had beginning in old times. Both were soldiers, daring and efficient, and a common cause, that of freeing Spain from French dominance, led to mutual liking. They campaigned together for years.

"A few hours' journey from Madrid, near Talavera lity, is a long bluff which Colonel Mendoza held, with English troops, against the fury of Joseph Bonaparte's eterans. It was the pivotal center of the Iron Duke's osition—of course, this Iron Duke was just Sir Arthur Wellesley then. This much is history."

"I have read of Señor Mendoza's notable part in that reat battle."

"Well, in the charge, the second day, when the French ne was breaking, Mendoza's horse was shot and it fell, inning him beneath. Peralta saved him from death at he hands of a Toulousan lancer. The Colonel mounted nother horse, nothing the worse for his experience. Twice before nightfall did he again owe his life to his riend Peralta. This, according to my informant."

Morando said nothing. The lady continued:

"Administrator Mendoza was instrumental in having a grant of land made to Señor Peralta, who came here o occupy it. He married and had a son, Abelardo. Later, the Administrator married, and his daughter Carmelita came to bless his home."

Morando was looking intently at the speaker.

"One night the renegades from the eastern valleys drove away many horses and cattle after maltreating he attending peons. Mendoza and Peralta, with their ighting Indians, pursued the fleeing miscreants. An arrow pierced Peralta's body, and he would have fallen o the ground had not Mendoza caught him. Under he protection of a branching oak, on the primeval illside, the end came. The dying man's head lay on Mendoza's lap, their hands clasped together, while

the sturdy Mendoza was weeping. Peralta spoke faintly:

" 'The soldier dies from a savage's arrow, after years of service on the field. Well, mio amigo, be a friend to my wife and boy.'

" 'You have my word of honor,' replied Mendoza.

"Peralta continued: 'And—and—yes. My senses are leaving me. I must speak quickly. Let our lifetime of friendship live after us, in the union of our children when they are grown.'

"There, in the shade of nature, the greater shadow of death hovering near, was the betrothal agreement made. The Indian riflemen stood around, sombreros in hand, their weapons lying on the turf, to do homage to death, the final conqueror. Señor Mendoza still held in his arms the clay of his friend, still his tears were falling. 'The Peralta and Mendoza friendship shall live on in our children,' he said in broken voice. 'The living and the dead make this consecration.' "

Morando's horse reared to perpendicular line. Unconsciously the Captain had gripped him with the spurs. The animal sprang from the beaten road through dense masses of underbrush, to the grassy field beyond. It required several minutes before Morando could bring the creature back to the señora's side. It still champed the bit, while its eyes flashed from the sting of the insult.

"Your horse is restive, señor soldier. Perhaps we have loitered along the way. Come, we can reach the Calderon home before the sun is warm."

They cantered in silence for a while.

"Let us go slowly for a few minutes," she said. "I find I am not so strong as I thought."

Paleness was again creeping into her face.

Morando quickly led her horse by the bridle to the door of a peon's cot near the wayside, and assisted her to dismount. The Indian wife came curtsying out, full of welcome.

"My house is yours," she insisted, bowing again and again. "Your visit will be long remembered. I am sorry my man is away and cannot help to receive you."

"Some warm water in a basin," said the soldier. "The señora has had an accident to her arm and it needs attention."

Morando unbandaged the arm, bathed it in tepid water, and rebandaged it more loosely.

The house was a one-room building, made of adobe, whitewashed outside and inside, with a red tile roof. The floor was earthen. A half dozen children tumbled about. The Indian woman sat on a rude settee and looked interestedly at the two occupying a similar piece of furniture.

"My man is absent in San Joaquin," she said. "He is a vaquero for Señor Higuera. We expect the cattle soon to return, and again I will have my husband."

The señora was charmed with the naïveté of the native.

"I'm sure you will be happy then," she said. Color had returned to her cheeks and brightness to her eyes.

"Great people need never be separated," the peona went on. "Now," speaking directly to Señora Valentino, "you had your husband with you when sickness

met you, and he drove it away. For me, two, three, moons," counting on her fingers, "I have fought it alone for myself and my pocos niños," pointing to her brood.

The señora smiled. "This señor is not my husband."

The woman looked intently at them. "The spirits of the future speak little here since Padre Lusciano came. He drives them away with the breath of his mouth. Dared they speak—dared they speak"—she laughed quizzically—"they would say—they would say——" She broke off and motioned to the third finger of the señora's left hand, and simulated placing a ring thereon. She turned to Morando and laughed again.

The señora arose to her feet. "Come, Capitan, let us thank the peona for her kindness and for her suggestion of prophecy, and go on our journey. I trust my strength will not fail again."

Morando offered money to the woman, but she would not accept it.

"The gold is for the ring," she replied with another queer laugh. "Why should I withhold kindnesses?" she asked. "God gives them to me. I should not keep them selfishly."

They thanked her for her good offices and went their way.

Señora Valentino was her buoyant self once more, while Morando, though all courtesy and attention, seemed in a quiet mood.

"Come, soldier mine," she suggested, "let us rejoice with the landscape and sing with the spring." She waited, then laughed gayly. "Perhaps the spirits of

ne future gave you an unhappy horoscope." Again ne gave way to merriment.

His answering laugh had a forced note, as he said: "What a pity the spirits are no longer free to speak ithout hindrance! In so far, my lady, as the peona poke for them their message flattered me." He doffed is cap sweepingly.

"Gallant soldier! But I was speaking a while ago f this province of California. Do you realize, Captain, hat here is a country exceeding Spain in area and qualing her soil in fertility?"

"I do realize it, indeed, señora. What we see here," ndicating the waving valley, "and even after a winter f drought, is a demonstration of most wonderful fer- ility."

"Under the English flag all old customs will flourish ere; the civilization developed will be along Spanish ines. Colonists will come in numbers and a mighty rincipality will grow—still it will be, in essentials, panish. A viceroy will be in power, combining the ffice of a general with that of governor. These vast aciendas will be fruitful farms supporting more hun- reds than they do individuals now."

"What you say, señora, is not impossible."

"What power, what patronage, what opportunity would belong to such a viceroy! It would be well-nigh that of a king."

Her companion made no response.

"My good soldier, of all the men in California who do you think would be chosen to this high office of civil and military leader?"

"Señor Mendoza I believe to be the ablest man in the province. After him, I would say, comes Carillo, in the South."

She smiled into his face.

"The first governor under English rule here will be chosen on recommendation of three people. I am one of those three."

"What can you mean, Señora Valentino?" asked the amazed man.

"I mean this. It is my belief that English governing will be the one most acceptable to the Californians. I have become Great Britain's special representative, and I am laboring to bring about a judicious consummation."

The soldier looked wonderingly at her. "Your words, señora, while surprising me, explain many things."

She went on: "When the British admiral opens in Monterey harbor his sealed advices, he will find a paper appointing as commander of the army and head of this province the man on whom the English consul, Captain Farquharson, and your humble servant have agreed as the right one for that office."

She paused in her remarks, as if expecting him to speak. He did not. She went on: "We have already made our choice." She spoke dispassionately. "Now, who do you think it is?"

"I can still form no idea, unless it be, indeed, Mendoza, or Carillo—or, possibly, one of the Picos."

"It is none other than Capitan Alfredo Morando."

He checked his horse.

She swung her mount to meet him. Neither spoke or several moments.

He bared his head. "Señora Valentino, words fail e to express my gratitude for your high opinion of e. I thank you most cordially and most humbly."

They rode on in silence.

At last they neared the Calderon hacienda house.

"Before long we salute you as 'Your Excellency.' "

"No, señora. As greatly as I prize the honor paid e by you and the other two I shall leave California orever, as soon as I can do so in fairness to my work."

The Calderons were hastening out to meet them. The nxious friends surrounded the señora. Inquiring and elcoming, they bore her away.

CHAPTER XIV

O'DONNELL TAKES A HORSEBACK RIDE

"GOOD pluck has that Indian lad of yours, Señor Mendoza. He faced the muzzles of the guns this morning without batting an eye."

Mendoza and O'Donnell were in the Administrator's office. Mendoza's eye was alert, his eagle face keen. The poncho thrown carelessly over his shoulders, his mustachios and imperial made him look the Old World soldier leader.

"My messenger evidently caught you before you broke camp." Mendoza spoke in English, as had the other.

"By my faith! he burst into camp on that sorrel like a meteor. I had 'Adelante!' half out of my mouth when he spurred on us. A dozen pistols were aimed at him, and why my fellows didn't shoot I don't see, except that they were afraid of hitting the horse. A native more or less wouldn't count, but these scoundrels know rare horseflesh night or day. Perhaps they'd peeked through the bars of your corrals, señor, when the peon riflemen weren't looking."

The frontiersman laughed. He lay back in his chair, crossing his legs, and waited for the other to speak. His beard and hair were free from the cords and were

wing over his breast and shoulders. The bearskin ggings seemed more shaggy than ever.

"Those men will be your companions for a thousand les?"

"I can expect no other, Señor Mendoza. Besides, ey serve me well."

"Señor O'Donnell, you represent great interests in lifornia."

"On another occasion I showed you documents which sert that."

"Very true. Now, at a critical time you lose yourself the wilderness, with no guard save a company of cut-roats who would take a man's life for a handful of sos."

"Ah, Mendoza, what you say is so. This is a critical me and my men would hardly ornament a Sunday hool. But I shall meet a representative of the United ates somewhere to the east of here, a thousand miles re or less, receive instructions from Washington, and nd back my reports. I go through safely; another ght not; so I am my own messenger. In the passing three new moons, as the Indian counts, I shall again in the Valley of Santa Clara."

The big man laughed again.

"You go through safely, you say. Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. My dare-devils respect the man who not afraid of them. Besides, I travel a country the iefs of which are sworn Indian brothers to me."

"And you trust them—these wild Indians of the ountains?"

"Again I say, absolutely."

"I hope your faith is not misplaced."

"It is not. Mendoza, I have been for ten years among these fierce tribes. From them I learned the moods of the desert and the paths that conquer the mountains. Their tents were mine, and they shared their food with me. I came to know the Indian heart, and was willing to become blood brother with their chiefs. Yes, I trust them absolutely."

"Blood brother?"

"It is a covenant of friendship. I am as sure it will not be broken as I am that Kit Carson will keep word and meet me beyond the high mountains a month hence."

"But this covenant of friendship—this becoming a blood brother—how did you manage it?"

"By transfusion of blood from their veins to mine. The medicine men are surgeons—of a kind; the arm veins supply the blood."

Mendoza looked closely at the frontiersman. "You are, then, an Indian leader."

"I have the long hair of a chief, as you see. I allow my beard to grow, also, which the natives cannot do, to show I am a chief of chiefs."

"A chief of chiefs! What of Yoscolo? Is he included in this unique brotherhood?"

"No; decidedly no. Yoscolo disdains Indian virtues, replacing them by white men's wickedness."

"Will you be safe from him on this journey?"

"My friends would harry him out of the Sierras, and down to these valleys where he would meet destruction at the hands of your riflemen."

"Very good, friend O'Donnell. But I am keeping

you too long. I will come to the point now. I detained you from an early start on that long road of yours for an important matter. The English have been very active in creating a sentiment here favorable to annexing our province to Great Britain."

"There are many signs of their activity; but others have been active too."

"It is time your government should survey roads between California and your westernmost outpost."

The large man sprang to his feet. "Capital, Mendoza! Capital, sir! It's good to hear you say that. I didn't expect it so soon. Will you put it down in writing, and sign your name to it?"

"Assuredly. I will also do my part toward welcoming settlers from your republic when the roads are built."

"Famous! Famous! That is exactly what I wanted you to say every time we've met. It's worth the hindrance in my journey to hear news like that." Then, suddenly, "Something special has happened to bring you to this conclusion. What is it? I've been debating for weeks with you, and with no apparent result."

O'Donnell seated himself. A peon had come in response to a signal from Mendoza.

"Aguardiente and cigarros," the master ordered.

"I can talk better when smoking," offering the other a light.

"Very well, I listen better."

They smoked for a little while without speaking.

"You know, personally, Farquharson, England's special representative here, if I remember rightly,"

Mendoza breaking the silence, his eyes intently studying his guest.

"I have not seen him for many years, but I once knew him well enough. He has been as busy as a bee for several months."

"Very true; but the other British agent, Señora Valentino, is still more active—of course you know all about it. By the way, was Yoscolo alone in the abduction of Farquharson a day or two ago in Monterey? Can you tell me? You know he was abducted. of course."

O'Donnell gave a roar of laughter, and smoked vigorously.

"It seems to me I did hear something of it. In fact, for a while everybody was inquiring for this lost Englishman. I ran into his servant who was ranging Monterey and shouting for his 'Cap'n.' I believe he found him too."

"It seemed to me that it was a little beyond even Yoscolo's talents to play such a game in Monterey city unless some white man had encouraged him."

The big man was greatly amused. "To tell the truth, Señor Mendoza, it was I who was in a measure back of that game."

"I thought as much."

"You see Farquharson came across the Indian several months ago, and played for his good offices. Not a bad idea, for a power of renegades followed him. All of Yoscolo's Indians were to declare for English sovereignty—much they know what it is. Yoscolo wanted money—the clever rascal. He made the capture as near

Farquharson's banker as possible—a suggestion of mine. I figured that Farquharson deserved to lose his money for his attempt at bribery. But the Englishman slipped the toils. I heard Yoscolo nearly had a fit when the news reached him."

"You do not like Farquharson personally?"

A gust of anger came over O'Donnell's face. "No! No! The Englishman is my enemy for something that occurred years ago in old Ireland."

"I too knew Farquharson many, many years ago. I have not seen him in late times. I blamed him once for an act that reflected on his judgment. Later he greatly distinguished himself at Waterloo. I am surprised that he would stoop to bribery. In fact, the manner of procedure of the English agents here has not disposed me to their cause."

"So much the worse for England, and so much the better for the United States," O'Donnell commented.

"Good friend O'Donnell, I favor the United States in the present matter because they reach two thirds across the continent to us already; because their government appeals to me; and, last but not least, because their agent, Señor O'Donnell, is not attempting to rush our people like sheep into the American fold."

"Three cheers for you, Señor Mendoza! Speak these words from the housetops. Your patriotism will soon equal my own. The Irish and the Spanish are always of one heart anyway."

"Some time ago I told you that if I played in this political game, I'd use the trump that meant the most to the province of California. I am far from forward-

ing my own interest in thus doing." He went to a secretary and took therefrom a bulky envelope. Opening it he handed to O'Donnell several papers, one of which read:

"On recommendation of the Duke of Wellington, Jesus Maria y José Mendoza, of Mission San José, California, is tendered the office of major-general in the army of Great Britain," and mentioning in highest encomium Mendoza's masterful service from Talavera to the fall of Toulouse which crushed Napoleon, and sent him to Elba. The document was signed and sealed by high officials of the kingdom.

The other papers were personal letters from Wellington, the dates of which ran through many years, urging Mendoza to accept promotion and offering to advance him in every way should he come to England.

O'Donnell scanned the Administrator critically. "Yet you remained with this province?"

"Yes. I cast my lot with California, and with her I shall live. An English protectorate would, without doubt, be more to my own personal advantage; however, I favor American rule here."

"But, Señor Mendoza, how about your neighbors, north and south?" All at once the Irishman sat erect, suddenly realizing the full meaning of the words he had read. "A major-general in the British army!" He looked admiringly at Mendoza. "At my best I was but a grenadier-sergeant."

"Friend O'Donnell, my neighbors, north and south, are playing 'Follow the leader' in no small way. Señora Valentino, sister-in-law of our acting-governor, Barcelo,

is the leader. She has cleverly brought them to the mountain top, and down the side they must go, by their own impetus—unless, O'Donnell, we hold them back."

"I know of this señora. Young Peralta raves over her. Carillo sings of her cleverness and beauty. The ladies vow she is a breath of old Madrid come to enliven the air of far-away provincial California."

"The señora is a very clever and a very beautiful woman," added Mendoza. "In Mexico I heard that she was coming here. She is famous on three continents as a most successful diplomatist. I can well believe she deserves the reputation."

"I'm sure of it—more than sure of it."

"Last night in my house my friends declared for the English flag. I advised consideration. She adroitly opposed. Her wishes carried. An attempt will be made to have the English government take possession at once. We must forestall them, O'Donnell."

"By my faith! By my faith! we must!"

"I love California too much to see her tossed precipitously into any hands, be it English or American."

The Irishman stormed back and forth over the floor.

Mendoza continued: "I have a plan, but the carrying it out would delay for some time your journey across the mountains."

"Carson awaits my coming, if I delay a month. What is your plan?"

"To find just where the American fleet is; catch the attention of your commodore; then call him for consultation with some of us here who have not been swept off our feet by the clever Señora Valentino."

"Three days ago the fleet stood into the scimitar-shaped bay west of here, Commodore Billings in command. He had sighted the British fleet off Callao, Peru, and scudded ahead of them."

"Bueno! Bueno!"

"I'll get in touch with Billings as soon as I can."

"Let him run his ships till he can anchor off some spot nearest San José Mission."

"The sooner I see the Commodore the better. Will you send a messenger to my camp telling my braves to wait there till further orders?"

"To be sure."

"Well, now to the saddle. I set out on horseback to overtake an ocean-going fleet. Ha! ha! ha!" the Irishman's wit coming to the fore.

"At least not till after breakfast."

"I've breakfasted already; thank you, señor. Adios!"

"Wait a minute. Tell me, have you been instrumental in keeping Yoscolo from molesting our herds and our servants in the San Joaquin? It must be some unusual influence that has held him quiet this long."

"I've threatened him with a trouncing from the strong tribes in the interior if he continues his deviltries. He met our chiefs in a great powwow in the Sierras and spoke of peace to them, in the voice of a cooing dove. They do not trust him; neither do I. I'll deliver the thrashing if he breaks his word."

"I greatly regret, Señor O'Donnell, that our California valleys did not know you years ago."

"The regret is mutual."

They passed out to the courtyard gate.

The house guests were returning from cool dips in the swimming ponds, according to custom; then breakfast; then rest.

"Who is the stranger with our host?" one dueña asked of another.

"Doubtless some trader in tallow."

"Even the early morning after the baile leaves not the señor free from their intrusion."

The men parted.

CHAPTER XV

SEÑORA VALENTINO MAKES A REPORT

"CAP', if I do admit it, I never saw such a place as this for growin' things. Look at that grass. The finest hay in America could be cut there in way less than a month. Good oat, too, every spear of it. Reckon 'twill pretty much go to waste. Durn shame it is. Wish I had a hundred of them acres back in old Missouri. Whew!"

Early in the morning Brown and his employer had ridden down the hills skirting the eastern rim of Santa Clara valley, and were laboriously making their way through the luxuriant growths of that fertile section.

"I am not sure these acres will not be as valuable one day where they are as they would be in your native section," returned Farquharson.

"Put in your wheat, rye or barley here," continued Brown; "raise your crop. Then where be ye? Nobody round to buy you up and pay you money. We're too durn fur away here, Cap', for the country to be more'n bird ranges—yes, bird ranges, where the blessed little fellers can warble and chatter from daylight to their bedtime."

"Brown, what would you think if I predict that in a short time colonists will come here, men understanding

farming and tree culture, to make this Western country their home?"

Brown shook his head. "If they double our tracks, Cap' from Santa Fé here, they'll need their fairy boots. Mighty rough trail we followed, and it's no smoother yet, I reckon. Besides, there's a sight of country between Santa Fé and civilization east of there which must be traveled some way. No, Cap', white men will shy this land for many a day, to my thinking. Durn sorry, too. Wish it wasn't so blame far from everywhere."

"But men can come here by water," suggested Farquharson.

"That depends where they start from. Quite a journey to here by water from Saint Louis, Missouri."

"No farther than England is from California. Brown, it would not surprise me if, before many years, shiploads of people from England will be tilling farms right here in this Santa Clara valley."

They were coming into the grounds of the Calderon hacienda. The white buildings gleamed in the morning light. The rolling hills formed a green background. Peons were going forth to the fields, at work in the gardens, or busy about their adobe cottages which nestled near the home of their master.

"Stay by the horses, Brown, while I enter," said Farquharson.

"Just as you say, Cap'."

The Englishman sought the entrance of the mansion and inquired for Señora Valentino.

"The señora met with an accident this morning,"

said one of the Señoritas Calderon who met him. "She is resting. Last night there was a baile at Señor Mendoza's, in Mission San José. She was there and has slept almost none till the present."

"Was the accident serious?" solicitude in his voice.

"Not serious, but painful."

"If you announce that Captain Farquharson would like words with her, I am sure she will not feel herself disturbed. It is really of great importance that I see her."

"What is it, querida?" asked Señora Calderon, coming to the outer hall.

"A señor caller to see Señora Valentino, mamita."

"She is nearly dropping for sleep, señor, as are we all. Besides, her hand is wounded."

"I saw your horse, Captain Farquharson, from my window, between winks. I had thought to catch an hour's sleep before you came. I am glad you are so prompt, though." Señora Valentino stood in the doorway. Then to Señora Calderon and her daughter, she said, "Friends, I made an engagement to speak with the señor caballero this morning."

"Pardon, señora. Pardon, señor," from the Calderons together. "We leave you."

"Well?" from Farquharson, when the others were gone.

"You have said it," Señora Valentino replied. "It is well."

"Tell me about it."

"In the first place, the Friar Lusciano Osuna has decided for active service."

"Good news, señora."

"The power of his words is overwhelming. He will be most valuable in winning Baja California to our cause. He came to see that English rule would be a fostering one to his Indian wards. On no other ground would he take part with us."

"But why do we need his work in Baja California more than in Alta California?"

"Good señor, this part of the province has been carefully worked over, and is responsive. In comparison, the lower half has scarcely been touched. I have made some representations touching sentiment there which may need bolstering."

"How?"

"Last night, at the baile, the young men, the most of them, were rapturously in favor of the English protectorate."

Farquharson smiled.

"The elders ardently followed; that is, the majority. A few hard-headed ones were obdurate. Mendoza, as I expected, was as set as a sheet anchor."

"Yes, señora."

"The greater number had arrived at that acute moment of mental tenseness when some outward act becomes a positive necessity. The dynamic, while thus agitating them, had set their consciousness in direction of an English protectorate. They became enthusiastic, perfervid, deadly determined on that protectorate.

"Then Mendoza voiced his desire of further consideration. So strongly did his personality affect the company that they were wavering, though still they shouted for England. Mendoza's very will was swaying

them. The moment of our success was passing. Once let it slip, and all the king's horses could not bring it back to power again."

"Go on, señora."

"Then I used a letter which Señor Carillo recently sent me—not reading it, but interpreting into its contents a meaning which might be fairly given, though I think it overtranslated the writer's position. The smoldering enthusiasm of our señors blazed again.

"Still Mendoza held them. I began to fear that nothing would come of the meeting which had begun so auspiciously."

Farquharson was very intent.

"Perhaps you remember, Captain, reading in your school days from that old Latin lesson book, 'Viri Romæ,' how the cackling of geese saved Rome?"

"Assuredly," laughed Farquharson.

"Well, a game of cards saved us last night. My brother-in-law had suffered defeat at cribbage, and consequently was piqued. I had, some time ago, broached him on the subject of our work here, and he was not favorable. So I said nothing more to him. My brother-in-law rates most highly his proficiency at cribbage, and takes it very hard if defeated. The very-evident hold of Mendoza on the land barons seemed to increase his ill-humor, and straightway he, acting-governor as he is, declared for England."

"Extraordinary, señora! Most extraordinary!"

"His words threw the Californians into a frenzy. They cast aside all restraint, and boldly declared for an English protectorate.

"Young Peralta, with the Señors Hernandez and Valencia, were appointed a committee to meet the British representatives at Monterey, and to arrange for the fleet to take possession of the capital. I would rather they had waited for this till we had brought Baja California to the same conviction of mind that our friends reached last night at Mendoza's; but I thought it wiser not to oppose. 'Better a bird in the hand than two in the bush,' Captain."

"Yes, señora."

"Now, I'm sure Padre Osuna can sway our southern friends as he pleases, but the friar must have time. If this committee comes in communication with our admiral now, and he takes over Monterey, Northern California will applaud, but—Southern California may rise in rebellion."

"Yes, yes."

"Then, our admiral must not be found until we judge the time is ready. Keep him away from Monterey until all sections will welcome his coming to raise the British flag on Monterey castle."

"Of course our government expects us to do our part before summoning Admiral Fairbanks to do his. The Admiral will not appear officially until that time."

"You have the idea, my Captain. The committee goes to Monterey, when it chooses; the fleet comes when we choose."

"Will Mendoza and the others like-minded make any counter move? Could you determine anything as to that?"

"No, nothing, possibly because they may have noth-

ing in mind to do. I spoke both to Zelaya and to Higuera. I think, Captain, they are an army with guns spiked. Yet, we must not relax until California becomes British territory."

"You say truly, señora. Admiral Fairbanks's fleet reached San Diego last week. Shortly he will anchor in the little bay north of Yerba Buena, where Francis Drake is believed to have sojourned. We will keep in touch with Fairbanks, and his ships will take possession of this province when the right moment comes; that is, when the people call aloud for it."

"A wise captain!"

"Tell me, señora, what of Morando? We have thought it well to bring high office within his reach. Now, what was his part in last night's victory?"

"He favors retaining the old ideals which Spain presented to all the New World provinces that she has settled."

"Yes, yes; let them be retained. But the present and great question? Did he stand by your side or Mendoza's?"

The lady bit her lip. "His steps found middle ground."

"Zounds; lady! Do you mean he is half-hearted?"

"I will tell you, señor. He is a Spaniard who has left the mother country for this wider field; nevertheless, he is a Spaniard, and he can never become English."

"He is welcome to remain the Spaniard in sentiment. Politically, however, he can be English. Is he different from the scores who last night declared for England?"

She did not reply.

"Does he look for a government different from the one to which his California brethren enthusiastically turn?"

Señora Valentino colored. "Captain Morando last night promised me to stand by Castilian manhood and womanhood. Hand and glove he declared it. Further he did not go. Try as I might he advanced nothing. The ruling thought of the hour passed him by."

"You astonish me."

"He is as deeply in love with Carmelita Mendoza as ever. His feet press after her everywhere." The señora's own foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"For this reason he favors Mendoza's reactionary tactics, you think?"

"I think his mind has never got very far beyond the fair Carmelita herself."

"A young and handsome fellow, my señora, makes love as easily as he talks. About as easily is it accepted —and forgotten."

"I do not think Morando's attitude toward the Señorita Mendoza can thus be described."

"Quite possibly, señora, quite possibly. Now, we had determined—it was your suggestion, by the way—to make this young man governor and commander here when the time comes. A splendid idea! All California will be proud of their handsome and brilliant leader. Our English colonists, when they arrive, will admire the soldier. A future of great usefulness and power awaits him. Why not find occasion, as you know him well, to tell him of these things, and make him one of us?"

"It is in vain."

"And why?"

"I did tell him. We rode together from Mission San José to this place."

"What did he say?"

"He said he contemplates soon leaving California forever."

"Most unaccountable, señora, most unaccountable! But—a man like Morando does not cast aside such prospects of high honors and power unless some strong counter attraction prompts him. Well—if he leaves, we must find someone to take his place."

Farquharson arose. "I hope your hand will not trouble you seriously. When do you return to Monterey?"

"I remain a day or two with the Calderons, then I go home."

"Allow me to congratulate you again on your success of last night. Directly I see Fairbanks I will send or bring you word. Good morning, señora. My best wishes to you."

The lady bade him farewell and watched him mount, the voluble Brown declaring, "These roses have spread out two inches while you've been gone, Cap'."

She waved another farewell, and turned again to the reception room. "I win provinces," she thought, "yet I am alone, alone. People crowd around me, yet am I lonely. I envy the peona we met this morning. I envy her the brood of pocos niños, her absent husband, and, above all, God of my soul! her contentment. If the world were mine I would give it for that!"

She went slowly to her room and closed the door,

then turned to the mirror. It showed the faultless face and form of a beautiful woman. "It is all to win provinces!—nothing but—provinces."

She remained long in thought.

"Nothing but provinces!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SEÑORITA OF THE WINDOW PANE

THE fog lifted from Monterey Bay, for a few fleeting moments hung in aerial battlements over land and water, then dissolved in the alchemic sun-rays. The blue stretches of water laughed and sang on the beach. Soft southern winds purred among the crags which edged the ocean, rustled the tree branches, waved the flowers, rested on the tiled roofs of the white city, and fanned the calm-souled populace.

Another day had begun in the capital.

It was some minor feast day. The bells of the church on the town outskirts rang their call to service. A moment's silence. In the distance a clear note sounded, its limpid melody clinging in the air. Another note, and yet another, and another, until the breath of the countryside was resonant. It was the chimes of San Carlos Carmelo, a league away.

A young officer rode slowly along El Camino Real leading into Monterey from the north. A dozen or more mounted carbineers followed him.

Peon children stared curiously at the uniformed men, and whispered among themselves of the great caballero whose scabbard clinked against his silver-mounted stirrup with each forward movement of the horse.

"Whither bound, Señor Capitan Morando?" called a group of churchgoers.

"To the house of Colonel Barcelo."

"The Colonel and his señora are already in the church," some one said.

The Captain bowed and smiled, but continued his way.

He led his men to the square, then walked to the Barcelo mansion.

Benito, the porter, guarded the entrance.

"Have my unworthy eyes the honor of beholding Captain Morando, of San José?"

"I am Captain Morando, and I wish to see Señora Valentino."

"I am honored to lead you within." The man bowed low. "The señora is in the reception hall."

He conducted Morando to a large room opening directly on the courtyard. Wide doors lying ajar invited the refreshing air to enter, as well the morning sun.

"The Captain Morando," the porter announced.

"You are taking the sun, I see, señora."

"At my lazy ease, Captain. Please be seated."

They chatted for a little on different topics, till she said:

"Captain Morando, I spoke to you, the morning after Mendoza's baile, of the combined civil and military governorship of California when England comes. I sent for you to-day that I might talk this matter over further with you."

"I am highly flattered to call on Señora Valentino. A delightful woodland ride is followed by this more than delightful meeting." The young man placed his hand

on his breast and inclined gracefully to the lady. She acknowledged the compliment by a single movement of the head.

"You do not forget that you have come this morning along El Camino Real—the King's Highway?"

"It is fit, truly, to be the highway of a king."

"Our Captain is appreciative. No?"

"In the past months I have followed it from San Diego to Sonoma, and have seen something of the magnificent framework of which this highway is the vertebræ."

The lustrous brown eyes smiled at him. "It has been traveled by vice-regal governor and Mexican envoy. This room received them. On that dais," pointing to a platform at the end of the apartment, "obeisance has been paid from the noblest the land held."

"Ah! this, then, was the state reception room," looking about with interest.

"Those straight-backed chairs along the wall held waiting grandees when California belonged to Spain; and governors for this province were sent from the homeland. Privy councils were held here. Agreements of state were formulated and signed here. Much of the history of California was made in this place. The house, from being the governmental palace, passed, in Mexican times, to private ownership."

"O, I see, señora."

"Captain, the old days must have been glorious, but, after all, they were but seeds of more significant times. The new governor will have vastly greater opportunity than the others ever dreamed of."

"I cannot doubt it, señora."

"Then, my Captain, be the first English governor in Monterey. The office will be yours for the taking."

"You speak to me, señora, of high office endowed with great power ready to my hand. Mindful as I am of your consideration, I could not, if I would, accept a place for which I have had no training, and for which I feel no aptitude."

"A modest captain! Your words do you credit, my soldier. But, you have not yet looked on all sides of the question. You would be the front of the incoming administration. Back of you would stand men who have had experience in applied statecraft, but who lack the unusual qualifications you possess successfully to represent English rule to the residents of this province."

"Still, señora, I would be occupying a position in which I would be entirely inexperienced."

"But think, Captain; consider. With time comes the experience."

"Again I thank you, señora. But, when I feel free to do so I shall leave California and seek a career elsewhere."

"California needs you. Castilian ideals and Castilian faith need you."

"I shall fail no duty, señora."

"But the governorship?" persistently.

"Senora, my friend, may I ask you to believe me when I say I could not accept it."

"Well, Captain, the formal offer, nevertheless, will come to you in a short time."

She touched a bell. Her maid entered.

"Atila, please bring us coffee and some of those dulces for which Alfonsa, the cook, is so famous."

The girl soon reappeared with a small table covered with a white cloth, and on which was dainty china ready for the serving. A pot of steaming coffee and a plate of freshly made sweet cake were added. A small vase of purple violets furnished adornment.

Gentle breezes stole into the room, carrying with them the nestling of the leaves in the patio and the perfume of the growing things.

"What a land of enchantment you have at your very side!" indicating the out-of-doors.

"Sometimes I fancy this to be a wishing-chair," indicating the one on which she was sitting. "Then the patio becomes unique. I often sit by the hour, and frame around it pictures of life as I would like to live it. That space outside is transformed into a jungle, the birds, my brothers and sisters, while the riotous colors embellish the leafy homes of the little people. Sweet woodsy odors refresh me, and I repose in the shady recesses, my heart singing the songs of Utopia-land."

"Most pleasing fancies, indeed, my señora."

"They are my refuge. I lose myself in fancyland to crowd out other and unhappy memories." Her eyes grew troubled. Her face lost its curves of power.

"My dear Señora Valentino," began the soldier, his chivalry touched, "your husband is gone from you, but——"

Her gesture stopped him.

"I anticipate your words, Captain. It is not what I

have lost that makes me sad. It is the absence of what forms the warp and woof of a woman's life, the things I have never had."

"What they can be I do not know, señora. I cannot imagine a life more filled than yours, except for the loss of——"

Again her gesture left his sentence incomplete.

"Captain Morando, forgive me if I say such words mock me."

"Señora, the world is at your feet. The bravest and the proudest court your smiles. At that ball in Madrid I saw our commander lead you to the king, and together they bowed over your hand, while the multitude applauded. Can you not even now hear them? 'Viva! Viva! the fairest and gentlest in the kingdom! Viva! Señora Valentino!'"

"Not that, Captain; not that," deprecatingly. "Praise from the lips fills not the heart. Five years ago a prima donna thrilled all Europe. King and subject alike did her homage. In Paris the noble were honored by drawing her carriage to the opera house, having detached the horses. Yet last year she died alone and heartbroken."

"But for you, my dear lady!"

"It almost overcomes me, Captain, when I look back over my life. I rarely have courage to do so." She knit her brows.

"You know Señora Barcelo is my half sister only?" abruptly.

"No, I did not."

"My father was an elderly man when he married my

mother. His daughter, now Señora Barcelo, was then nearly grown. My mother died when I was three years old, my father, a few months later. I can scarcely remember either. My half sister married and went away. I was placed in the convent of Maria del Pilar, in Madrid."

"Maria del Pilar!"

She nodded.

"I was in the division of the convent assigned to the daughters of hidalgo worth. I was reared there, on the strictest monastic lines. I was naturally lighthearted. Perhaps my grave teachers did not understand me, for they fettered my spirit by restrictions most onerous. If they had only taken the little motherless child to their arms and kissed away the loneliness!

"One day I was in punishment for some infraction of discipline. The penalty was to remain alone in the dormitory, on the topmost floor of the building. I heard martial music in the square before the convent. I knew that the cadets of San Sebastian military school were drilling there."

"Why, señora, I——"

She continued. "The windows were stained except one pane, not a large one, which had been broken and replaced by plain glass. I climbed to it—the pane was rather high—and witnessed the military maneuvers. I remember the captain of one company as well as if it were yesterday, his youthful figure and trim uniform, his sword against his shoulder, his intent face."

Morando was listening closely.

"Whenever I could I watched that cadet corps at its

evolutions on the plaza. Often I stole away from study to the dormitory.

"One day the captain saw me. He waved his sword. I tapped the glass. That formed a code of signals."

The soldier smiled.

"The years went on. I saw my young captain become a colonel; saw his smooth lip darken with mustachios. His eyes and sword flashed at me the first time he wore the colonel's chevrons.

"A firm hand on my shoulder startled me one day. 'Step down, señorita,' came the voice of our prefectress of discipline. 'Now let *me* see this great sight!' My colonel was waving his sword toward the window. He turned away when the new face came in view, but not in time to prevent the sister prefectress seeing the salutation.

"A council was called. My teachers decided that a very grave breach of discipline had been committed. The prefectress, even with inspection from a nearer window, could not designate the cadet who had waved his sword. 'How long has this continued?' they demanded. I told them. They were greatly shocked.

"I was ordered to point out the military student who had been so indiscreet as to carry on flirtation with a hidalgo's daughter in Pilar Convent. I refused to do so, nor could they overcome my will. I feared for him. The mother superior vowed she would have him 'broken.' She was the cardinal's sister, and all-powerful.

"My penalty soon came. The head of my family, a cousin, was called. He took as grave view of my conduct as had my teachers. 'A marriage must be ar-

ranged for the imprudent girl at once. A man of years and firmness should be found. This levity must yield to correction,' he decided.

"Colonel Valentino had been a widower for several years. He was my cousin's intimate friend. The wedding day was set before I even saw my future husband.

"I objected to the marriage, but the Spanish conventions of our class are as unyielding as stone. What could I do, but finally consent? At seventeen I found myself married to a man old enough to be my father. There was nothing in common between us. He meant to be kind. He was just, as he was courageous and able. I accompanied him on diplomatic missions and learned much, but knew no happiness. Then he went to Morocco, and death. I am here to work in a cause I believe to be right, but——"

She bowed her head. "If I gained the whole world for England, it would not fill one empty cranny of my heart."

Morando did not know what to say in response.

"I have never known a father's care, nor a mother's love. Add to this unhappy childhood. Add again a loveless and childless marriage, and you have my life."

"My dear señora! My dear señora!" His words stopped. He was standing before the lady, who also arose, her eyes flashing, her tones vibrating.

"I was in Constantinople, Great Britain's agent, when the news came of Colonel Valentino's death. I started at once for Spain. A storm raged on the Sea of Marmora. I took the wedding ring from my finger and threw it into the foam. The roar of the tempest

and the shriek of the cordage was the requiem of that marriage-symbol. I wish I could bury the past and its memories as deep as is buried that ring. But memories will not down," she went on passionately. "Some unquiet spirit possesses them. They trouble my sleep at night; they walk with me in the day. And, O, my Captain, the future!" She closed her eyes with a little shudder, as if to blot out unpleasant sights.

"My dear lady, you forget what you are in the lives of others. Even that embryo soldier, the cadet of San Sebastian's, welcomed his colonelcy the more because the girl-face in the little diamond pane would brighten when she saw the uniform. The inspiration to win honors came in no small degree from that topmost spot of grim old Pilar Convent."

He looked intently at her, his voice throbbing with emotion.

"My señora, have you known—did you know—do you not——" His voice broke.

She said nothing, but her eyes searched his.

"O, señora—that night at the ball in Madrid—that night when you——"

"What, my Captain?"

His words came more steadily.

"When I saw you at General Guerrero's ball I was beset by voices from the past calling to me, persistently calling. I was introduced to you. The voices called louder. Still were they incoherent. The evening grew. I danced with you. I could not fathom the meaning of that call which sounded with increasing insistency. The days passed. I concluded that some wraith of

dreams had hovered over me. At the merienda, when again introduced to you, I did not, for the moment, recognize the Señora Valentino of that military ball. You reminded me of our previous meeting, which I immediately recalled, the difference in your gown explaining my lack of recognition. As I talked with you the past spoke again to me, and in language I could not comprehend.

"O, señora, need I tell you that I was that cadet-lad who for three years waved his sword in greeting to the girl at the window! I have never forgotten you."

"But when the face did not again appear at the window?"

"I saw the stern visage replace yours, and afterward there was a blank. I had no way to reach you."

"Yes," calmly, "the incident was closed. My betrothal was arranged, and you started on your campaigns."

"I had no thought punishment would come to you."

"It came."

"My dear lady, I would have saved you at any cost had I known. My heart bleeds that I was in any way the cause of tragedy in your life."

"You are more than kind, Captain."

"I wish I could give back to you those lost years."

"Your wish is most generous, señor."

"Before an unwilling marriage should have been forced on you I would have scaled those barbed walls to bear you away with me, after the manner of the knights of old."

"But you did not know. The walls were unscaled.

From the girls' dormitory I went into life—and such a life it has been! The soldier-lad's life was different."

Her bosom was heaving, her breath coming in quick catches. She crumpled into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"O, señora, señora!" moving a step nearer.

A storm of sobbing was the only reply.

He knelt by her side.

"O, señora! My dear señora!"

He put his hand on her shoulder.

"Look at me, my poor, crushed señorita of the window pane."

She let one hand drop to her side, the other reached to his. The velvet eyes brimming with tears looked piteously at him.

"I ask—I beg of you—O, señora——"

Somehow she came into his arms.

"Until to-day I never knew that you were the señorita of the window."

"You were the knight who went to the wars and left forlorn his lady."

A fresh sob convulsed her. The compelling personality of the señora was gone. The imperious, beautiful woman was submerged in a being clinging and tender.

The man made an effort to speak, but his tongue refused to obey. Finally: "Señora, I too am desolate. My sympathy for you is yet the greater because my own heart has been bereft. Señora——"

A heavy foot was on the vestibule floor. Colonel Barcelo entered.

"Benito, the scoundrel, asleep in the sun! Actually asleep! A pretty sentinel! 'Pon my soul! I smell coffee. I've had no breakfast and am hungry as a wolf."

He pushed forward.

"Why, here's Morando! Glad some one was here in my place to entertain you. My wife's sister hasn't felt herself since that confounded affair over on the Mendoza grant. He should be told of the birds of prey that infest the place. Time he should set those prize native riflemen of his to killing off such pests. Caramba! but that coffee smells good. Is there any of it left?"

Señora Barcelo had followed her husband into the room.

"Crisostimo! Why, you have not even said good morning to the Captain! Of course breakfast will be ready for us at once."

"I hope so! Hope so! Morando, I heard this morning the most wonderful sermon of my life. Something I didn't expect to be able to say in this town. Padre Osuna, of Mission San José, preached. 'Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not,' was his text. Applied it to the Indians of the province, our duties to them, and all that. I've never been so near heaven in my life as when he was speaking. Looked at my watch when he began—force of habit, you know. Looked again when he finished. 'Twas just fifty-seven minutes. I would have sworn it wasn't ten.

"Come in!" he called, in response to an insistent knock at the door.

It was Benito.

"A messenger from Señor Berryessa is at the outer gate. He seeks Captain Morando. Renegades last night attacked some outlying corrals, killed and wounded a number of vaqueros, then set off by starlight toward the eastern passes, taking many cattle and horses."

Morando hastened to the door.

"Pity you can't stay and have coffee with us," said Barcelo.

The Captain's spurs were already jingling on the pavement. "Adios!" he called back.

"A fine fellow, that!" the Colonel remarked. "Sorry I was out when he first came. In the new order I'll have men enough to crush out the renegades once for all. The Captain won't be run so off his feet then."

CHAPTER XVII

O'DONNELL SETTLES WITH YOSCOLO

THE luminous haze of late spring lay contentedly over the Mendoza hacienda. The noon hour had come with its somnolent warmth; and all nature was dozing in the sun, except the bumblebee, victim of omnipresent unrest, and the humming bird, which always finds the day too short for its multifarious duties.

The peon workman, in from the fields, was satisfying hunger in his whitewashed cot; or, the meal over, was stretched on the earthen floor, a kerchief over his face, enjoying the midday siesta. The peona wife stepped lightly around tidying the room, and then took place by her husband's side, their children lying tumbled about.

Peace rested on the Indian adobe village which flanked the hacienda house. Inside the mansion itself there reigned the stillness of night.

A footstep descending stairs somewhere seemed unusually loud. Finally a door opened, making a grating, out-of-place sound. Señor Mendoza's erect form appeared on the west side of the courtyard. He walked leisurely toward an avenue shaded by the interlacing branches of thick-leafed walnut trees. A tiny brook fed by a spring in the middle of the courtyard purled along by his feet. A grateful coolness lifted itself to greet him. The odor of damp earth mingled pleasingly with the scent of flowers; and from under the south

wall of the inclosure came the rhythm of a miniature waterfall as the brook lost itself on the rocks many feet beneath.

The señor found that he was not alone in seeking the leafed coolness of the walnut alameda. The Doña Carmelita was standing at the end of the walk listening, apparently, to the music of the water. Her hair, free save where a golden clasp held it at the neck, gave play, as it flowed over her back, to the beginning breezes from the western sea. The profile of her face was thoughtful. Delicate lines traced the exquisite fullness of a form straight and slender.

"My daughter is a beautiful woman!" he half ejaculated.

Many thoughts ran through his mind in panoramic vision. He recalled the long gallery in his father's castle where had hung the pictured forbears of the de la Mendoza. Generations were there. Their characteristic form and features had descended to Carmelita. No government rule could prevent that, though it might vent titles and confiscate lands.

"My daughter a woman! A beautiful woman!" The thought half startled him.

The girl turned and walked toward him.

"Little papa! Little papa mine! are you taking the siesta on your feet?"

Carmelita's slender hands were on his broad shoulders, and she was endeavoring to shake him. Her merry laugh pealed through the avenue.

"I smiled at you, and smiled at you, and blew kisses at you, while you looked at me as if I were a thousand

leagues away, and you deigned never the least recognition," standing on tiptoe and kissing him.

"I was living again the years of very long ago."

"Tell me about it, little papa."

She took his arm, and together they walked along the avenue.

"Tell me about it, papacito," she repeated.

"Why are you not at the siesta?" disregarding her question.

She looked up at him demurely.

"I did not care to sleep. Besides," jestingly, "we must accustom ourselves to the ways of the Americano who will soon come here. You remember I have spoken to you of Señor Brown, the man who was so thoughtful in the cave the night of the storm?"

He pressed her arm tenderly in reply.

"I saw him lately in San José. He told me, among other things, that Americanos never sleep in the day, and sparingly at night; indeed, often with one eye open." She laughed. Her father joined.

"The Americanos are coming, you say?"

The girl stepped in front of him, placed her hands against his breast and looked into his face.

"Papacito mio, since the baile you have slept not one night at home, but in the morning returning with the travel-stains of much riding. Messengers are coming and going between you and the bearded stranger after whom Benito rode away so furiously in that early morning. I know my little father too well to think he will allow Señora Valencia and Hernandez and the others to have their way so easily about England coming here.

Yes, the Americanos are coming, because you have willed to have them come. Papacito, I feel it."

"My child, England, the greatest power the world knows, does not rely so much on Valencia and Hernandez, nor yet the others, as on the wit of a very clever woman, seconded by Captain Farquharson, principal of your good friend, Brown."

The doña's arms fell to her side. They resumed their walk.

"Captain Farquharson also was very kind the night of the storm."

"I do not forget that, little one. When Padre Osuna came to me, the evening of the baile, with word that the Englishman was in straits, I intended to help Farquharson, even by placing myself under obligation to O'Donnell, which I would have disliked very much, at that time."

"Why, papacito, did Padre Osuna come to you?"

The señor smiled. "Señora Valentino."

The girl's eyes once more bent in thought. "Why?"

"Again the night in the cave," he laughed. "I am indebted to the padre, and could not have refused his request to help the English captain, of which the señora was well aware. Immediately I divined O'Donnell to be the real cause of Farquharson's predicament, and I knew that he would gladly grant me the request, did I make it, to free the captive. The lady's mind ran the gamut of the cause and effect."

"It is like an endless puzzle, my papa."

"Which the Captain solved of his own accord by taking himself out of his plight, aided by Brown."

They walked a little while in silence. Filipo, the porter, looked in surprise at them from his high seat in the lodge. Usually he was the only person awake on the hacienda at this hour. His little beady eyes followed them up and down, up and down the avenue.

"My daughter," the father finally said, "we have in California, in a small way, an example of the game of statecraft. Europe plays on a larger scale, but it is the same. There, as here, the charm and brain of woman supply the leverage for overturning states."

"I would not have thought Señora Valentino gifted in that way."

"Six months ago the señora and Farquharson were in Mexico City. Don Juan Domingo told me of them. O'Donnell also was there, but under an assumed name. I too was there, though I saw none of the three. The lady's fame had followed her to the capital. Her hand has in no way lost its cunning here. The older men—well, we know how they accepted her wishes a few nights ago; and the young men are at her feet. No wonder."

Carmelita said nothing.

"Señora Valentino has won the padre to her side; has influenced the well-poised Carillo, of the South, and many others there. She has, in the North, toyed with men's intelligence whose balance I had never before doubted."

The girl's eyes were straight ahead. The father and daughter went for a few moments without speaking.

The señor broke the quiet. "Little one, if by any chance future years shall see misfortune here, provision has been made for thee across the seas. The proceeds

of the lower hacienda, thy mother's, had she lived, have been placed for thee in London's Bank of England. Friends thou wilt find in England. Their names are written in my will. Thou canst find protection there always, should it ever fail thee here."

"California has been thy home, my father, and it shall always be mine."

"A brave daughter and a loving one."

It was some time before further conversation.

"Thou art a woman grown. Though I married late in life, yet may I still live to see thee on a husband's arm."

She looked archly at him. "There is Don Abelardo. You know friends have said that his father and mine arranged for a match."

"Yes; but it is not true. You are to have the making of your own life."

"Papacito, my dueña says that more and more are people speaking of this purported engagement. I know, of course, how the story began with the peons present when Abelardo's father passed away in your arms; but, why should such sudden interest arise now?"

"The peons understood little of Señor Peralta's words, and spoke much, as Indians often do. His utterance touched the friendship of his family and mine, nothing more. Peralta would never have dreamed of betrothing our children without their wish and consent; nor I of entering such a compact, though such has been the custom in Spain—a custom truly more honored in the breach than the observance."

"But, papa, I don't want this idea that Abelardo and

I are engaged to be married to get so widely about. What can we do?"

"Do nothing, my girl, do nothing. Attention paid to such things only nourishes their growth. What does it amount to, anyway?"

Filipo came over to them.

"Captain Morando, and many with him, are dropping down the steep hills, and are coming in this direction. The field glass shows them plainly."

Mendoza and his daughter walked toward the gate.

"Morando is one of the few who have not been influenced by Señora Valentino. He has maintained clear head and uncompromised tongue. Sword and glove he has declared himself for Castilian manhood and womanhood. I would be willing, as, indeed, should everyone, to clasp hands with the señora on that declaration; as did the Captain in the supper-room the night of the baile. I wish all my friends had held their wits against this agent of Great Britain as firmly as he."

The señorita paled, then flushed.

"Pity that Morando thinks of leaving California. I have it not directly from him, but O'Donnell heard him say that he intends to seek new fields as soon as he can," continued the señor.

Morando and his soldiers rode to the gate and saluted the Mendozas.

"I have several men who are rather severely wounded. May I leave them here in your care while we push on farther?"

"Certainly, my friend, certainly. But, Morando, you are tired, I know; so are your men. Alight, every

one of you, for rest and refreshment. Filipo, call the servants from the siesta."

The loud blast of Filipo's bugle brought life into the hacienda house and around it.

"Muchas gracias, señor. I cannot remain. We have been engaging Yoscolo since yester noon. This morning a large number of the renegades came to the front and fought vigorously for a time. Then they scattered. Some of the prisoners have told us that, during the fight, Yoscolo and a picked body of his men doubled around us, intending to cut across the valley, and make the Santa Cruz mountains at La Cuesta de los Gatos. We must hurry in pursuit."

"Yoscolo, is it? Caramba!" from Mendoza. "In an hour O'Donnell comes here. I'll guarantee he will be glad to ride with you after Yoscolo."

"I should be glad of his services, but——"

"But, wait, Captain. O'Donnell will pick up the rascal's trail as no other man can. Before night he will be riding in his heels. Come, Morando, dismount. Let your men take the horses to the stables."

"I know of O'Donnell's value in such contests as this; but the trail will be an hour colder."

"Not so, Captain. The Indian will leave false tracks in abundance. The Americano frontiersman's eyes will not be deceived. Better wait, my friend."

Morando finally consented. The wounded men were cared for, and the weary men and horses were refreshed.

Before the hour was up the soldiers and their mounts were outside the courtyard gate, ready for the order to advance.

Mendoza went to the tower searching the horizon with a field glass. The Captain stood across the courtyard waiting word from his host that O'Donnell had come into sight.

Carmelita came out of a low door deeply let into the side of the left wing of the house. The hospital department of the hacienda was there. The girl was carrying a flat vessel containing lint and bandages.

"Your wounded are as comfortable as possible, Señor Captain," she said, as she passed Morando.

"I thank you and Señor Mendoza for it."

"Ah! Papacito is looking toward us and holding up his hand to catch our attention."

"O'Donnell is in sight a league away," Mendoza's voice came clearly to them.

"Gracias, Señor Mendoza," the soldier called in return.

The señor left the tower and walked along the roof to an outside staircase.

The girl held up the lint and bandages. "The peona nurses and I prepared these for people injured on the rancho. I rejoice that we had them ready for to-day."

"Fortune favored us in being within such easy reach of your ministrations, señorita doña. One or two of the men could not have gone much farther. I shall not forget your kindness."

"Not kindness, Señor Capitan! A privilege and a duty! We are here in our stronghold, while you are bearing the heat and the burden of the day. Our fruitful valleys smile the more happily because of your protection."

"Your words are encouraging, señorita."

"I want to be more than encouraging. I mean to be appreciative. I wish I knew how to say more."

"The señorita is good to the soldier. In the name of my comrades, I thank you."

Her face flushed.

"Captain, will you not be seated? The shade of that fig-tree invites you. The afternoon may make much call on your strength."

She took seat on a rustic chair and motioned him to a bench in front of her fashioned around the tree-trunk.

"I am glad O'Donnell will assist in this work. He is a man who makes sure of his position before pushing ahead," spoke Morando.

"Is the good Señor Americano, then, so infallible?"

"Quite so. Still, to err is human."

"But to forgive, divine, Señor Captain."

"Señorita Doña," hesitatingly, "perhaps there are things humans can hardly be expected to forgive."

Again her face flushed, and she bit her lip.

"Yes—and even if done under misapprehension." Her eyes looked straight at him.

"Of course the offense remains despite the misapprehension—of course it remains," from Morando. His eyes sought the ground.

Neither spoke for a moment. Peons were running hither and thither. Señor Mendoza had descended from the roof and was sauntering toward them. Filipo's field glass pointed along the road leading up to the gate.

"Señorita Carmelita, we can at least be friends. Is it not so?"

Mendoza was at their side. "Captain, when did you first find out about this raid?"

"Yesterday morning. I had ridden to Monterey, to call on Señora Valentino where the messenger came. I had some men with me. The others came up at the Berryessa rancho."

"Yes, Filipo, I'm coming," in response to a signal from the porter.

Mendoza walked briskly toward the gate.

"Friends!" Carmelita arose, her eyes flashing.

Morando also arose. "I do not consider my friendship of light value, Señorita Doña Mendoza."

"I do not share your high opinion of that friendship, Captain Morando."

The loud challenge of O'Donnell's horse was heard.

"Morando! Morando!" Señor Mendoza called.

"Coming immediately, señor. Good afternoon, señorita doña." The Captain hastened to the courtyard gate.

The señorita went up to her room, a storm raging in her heart.

"If Captain Morando dares mention the name of Señora Valentino in my presence again, I'll forbid him ever to speak to me." She clenched her hands.

The sound of many moving horses under her window called her thoughts.

The soldiers were setting out. Tomaso and a hundred of Mendoza's fighting peons were with them. Morando and O'Donnell rode together, in earnest conversation.

"The place to find the scamp is always where you

would least likely think him to be," O'Donnell observed.

Yoscolo's trail was found at the Berryessa rancho, where he had been the morning of the previous day. The Indian had waited some time to obtain powder from a cache in the hills, then started across the valley, secure in the thought that Morando and his men were miles away in the mountains.

About the middle of the afternoon he was overtaken at La Cuesta de los Gatos, ten miles south of San José.

At sight of the pursuers Yoscolo intrenched himself in a rocky cañon, which, he believed, could not be approached by flank movements, while a successful frontal attack seemed impossible. Here he waited, intending to slip away at night.

O'Donnell, on the stallion, followed by Tomaso and his peons, scaled the rocky edge of a precipice, and suddenly appeared on a ledge thirty feet above the renegades.

"El Diablo! El Diablo!" they shouted.

A number of shots were fired at O'Donnell. He swung under the horse's body, and the shots went wild.

The stallion braced its feet and slid down the cliff followed by the others.

A terrible hand-to-hand conflict was waged. Fortune would favor one side, then the other. Finally, the two leaders came together in the middle of the little valley at the head of the cañon. The giant made thrust after thrust of his lance at the Indian, who parried successfully, pressing his opponent hotly in return.

The stallion's part in the combat was no small one.

He whirled his master out of harm's way, or pushed into the fight, at a simple turn of the rein.

Yoscolo's horse stumbled. The stallion sounded its scream, and rushed against the other mount, throwing it from its feet.

The Indian sprang free from his falling horse, and, grasping O'Donnell's stirrup-strap, vaulted to the back of Drumlummon. His face snarled furiously as he struck his knife at O'Donnell. Before the blow could fall a backward thrust of O'Donnell's lance ended the outlaw's life.

Morando's command attacked the renegades' front. The deep-shadowed cañon rang with carbine volleys, the screaming of horses and the shouts of men.

The Indians were dismayed at the leader's fall, but Stanislaus took charge, and urged on the fight. Nightfall, however, saw the complete defeat of the robber band. Stanislaus was captured.

"I've settled with Yoscolo. Now I'll ride to Mission San José and finish my call on Mendoza," was O'Donnell's laconic remark.

CHAPTER XVIII

FARQUHARSON MEETS WITH A LOSS

"THE Cap'n wants me to give this 'ere paper to the padre and nobody else. Consequently, nobody else gets it."

"No sabe, señor."

Brown was standing outside the gate of Mission San José. The porter's face was wrinkled into lines of firmness. The caller had asked for Padre Osuna and had held up a sealed envelope on which was written the friar's name. The man in the lodge had asked for the communication, first in Spanish, then in the world-known sign language. Brown understood the signs, but was determined to place the letter in the addressee's hands himself.

"No such trouble go get to see the minister in my country," Brown commented.

"No sabe, señor," again from the porter.

"You don't understand much, pore critter," said Brown, unwittingly using the meaning of the other's words. "Well from them to whom little is given little is to be expected; so, go to the deuce till I can find a way to beat something into your thick head."

Brown's words were unintelligible, but his contemptuous manner spoke plainly enough to the Indian, who broke into a volley of indignant Spanish.

The American slipped the bridle reins over his horse's

head and led the animal across the street to the Mendoza hacienda house.

Señor Mendoza had just returned from riding. A half score of mounted Indian riflemen were a short distance back of him. The Administrator nimbly sprang from his horse and awaited the newcomer. Several of the peons unslung their carbines from their shoulders, but replaced them at a motion from the señor's hand.

"Can you talk American?" was Brown's characteristic question.

Genuine amusement was in Mendoza's laugh. "I am not sure. I can understand you, however. I'm sure of that."

Brown looked at the tall, gray man. "I reck'n you're the little girl's pop," he observed. "She favors you mightily in every way, 'cept in size and age. Met her again the other day in San José. We was tickled to death to see one another."

"So you are Brown. I am very glad to meet you. Allow me to thank you for your generous kindness to my daughter and the lady with her that night in the cave."

Mendoza advanced, his hand extended in hearty greeting. The American took the proffered hand with a viselike grip.

"You bet I'm Brown—Simon James Brown. Saint Louis, Missouri, is my post office address. I'm proud to know ye, sir."

The señor recovered his hand from Brown after it had been given a series of pump-handle shakes.

"What me and the Cap'n did for your folks the

night of the freshet gave us as much pleasure as it did them," Brown continued in a mincing way, as if the occasion demanded some special effort from him.

"I regret that I did not have opportunity that night to thank you and your captain."

Brown wagged his head in a friendly way. "Curious feller is the Cap'n. Mind, he's a decent chap to work for and all that. I like him better all the time; but his ways are past finding out, you bet."

Mendoza bowed courteously to the stranger and smiled obligingly. "What you see before you, Señor Brown, is yours. Will you not enter?" He waved his hands over grounds and house.

Brown looked dubiously at the other. The señor's suave dignity forbade the thought that he was joking.

"I declare, I never had so much property before in my life. Does the deed go with it?"

Mendoza smiled and repeated his gestures.

"I don't reck'n I'll go in just now," he said dryly. "You see, I'm workin' and my time isn't my own. I'm lookin' for the minister of that there church," pointing to the Mission over the way. "I can't make the feller in the box catch my meanin'."

"Ah! You wish to see Padre Osuna?"

"That's the name written here," producing the envelope.

"Very well, my friend. Come with me. I'll speak to the porter for you."

"Señor Brown, shall I accompany you across the way?"

"I'll be much obleeged."

"Filipo!" called Mendoza.

Filipo understood. He came out the gate, took the horse's bridle from Brown, then clapped his hands together sharply. A peon boy came running. The porter gave quick command in Spanish. The boy sprang into the saddle and galloped after the riflemen.

"I—see here—" ejaculated the astonished Missourian. "Why, I have to ride that nag to Monterey to-night!" alarm beginning to show in his face.

"The horse will be fed and cared for, Señor Brown," assured Mendoza.

"I'll see that you have a mount to Monterey." Then quickly: "You rode through the lower Santa Clara from Monterey to-day?"

"Sure, I did."

"Saw no signs of renegades?"

"Nary sign. Haven't seen a renegade since I swatted a bunch over last week."

The two went in the direction of the Mission lodge. Noting the erect figure and decisive step of the Californian, Brown squared his heavy shoulders and endeavored to walk in dignified fashion.

Mendoza said a few words to the lodge keeper. The gate opened noiselessly.

"Brown, you are to enter. When your business is over, come to my house. Do not start for Monterey until I see you again. Will you promise, my friend?" The señor held out his hand.

"All right. I don't know where my horse is anyhow. Besides, I'd enjoy to come in and set a spell." He administered several hearty handshakes.

Mendoza turned and walked toward his own gate.

"I declare," Brown soliloquized, "in my country that 'seenyore' there would have come right into the preacher's setting room and stayed around a while."

The porter, by crooking his finger, indicated that Brown was to follow him.

"All right," assented Brown. "I'll follow where you can lead anyway."

The Indian took him within the quadrangle. The busy life he saw attracted his attention.

"A lot of you folks do seem to be working at something or other," he remarked to the porter.

"No sabe, señor," was the answer.

"Seems to me I heard you say something like that before."

They came to the friar's apartments. Juan Antonio met them.

"Be you the Reverend?" asked Brown.

"No sabe, señor," from the old major-domo.

"That there 'pears to be a common remark," commented Brown.

Juan Antonio signaled Brown to come with him.

"All right, 'seenyore,' I'm coming. 'Pears to me this might be a likely place for a deaf-and-dumb man."

He was ushered into a small room well lighted by the afternoon sun. The padre arose to meet him.

"You wish to see me, brother?" he asked.

Brown dropped his sombrero on the floor and made the lowest bow of his life. "I have a letter for you, Reverend."

"A chair, my brother. Ah! I recognize the hand-

writing," taking the letter. "Kindly excuse me while I read it."

"I shall return an oral reply to Captain Farquharson. Say to him, 'Yes, I will see him.' "

"I'll do it."

The friar seated himself. "I see you are not an Englishman, my friend."

"No, indeed, I'm American, lock, stock, and barrel."

"I thought as much from your accent."

"My accent!"

"Yes. Your manner of speaking English is quite different from that to which I have been accustomed."

"I speak good old United States," Brown said, warmly.

Padre Osuna laughed. "I have met occasionally seafaring men here and trappers of your nationality."

"I reckon they do slop over into this country. I wish more of them would come. But we are a long way off when we are at home."

"Did you come here as a trapper or as a sailor?"

"Nary trapper; nary sailor. I'm here on the proposition of big game huntin'."

The padre made no reply, but looked intently at his visitor.

Brown now felt that some remarks on matters religious were due from him.

"I haven't been to church none in California because I'm entirely ignorant of the prevailin' tongue," he started in abruptly. "It's no use to set under preachin' if you don't understand the preacher."

The padre laughed. "Certainly both preacher and

congregation would be at a disadvantage in such case."

"I've seen men around Monterey and elsewhere dressed in the same way you are, but I haven't spoke to them, bein' uncertain of their knowledge of my talk."

"I fear that not one of my brethren could understand you."

"So I reckoned. Now, I'm not a religious professor at this time, though I'd delight to set under good preachin'. I and all my folks are hard-shelled Baptists."

"Indeed."

"Yes. But bein' mate on a Mississippi freight boat and handlin' nigger deck hands begets an unregenerate spirit."

"You found it so?"

"I did. That was one of the reasons why I left steamboatin'. Diversion and love of adventure were the others."

"You say you came here on the proposition of big game hunting. You have, then, given up your project for the time being to take service with Captain Farquharson?"

"O, no, Reverend. The Cap'n is here on the same proposition. When I first met him he was plum daffy on big game. The big game he wanted resided only in California. Now, being a man of the world, I'd mixed a good deal with the huntin' of bear, et cetery. I reckoned I could do huntin' in a plain way on the Pacific Coast, so I became first mate in the Cap'n's outfit, and here I be."

The friar looked searchingly at Brown. "Your outfit is doubtless richer by many peltries at this time."

Brown laughed and slapped his thigh. At the same time a shrewd twinkle came into his eyes. "Most curious thing in nature! The minute the Cap'n comes where big game abounds he loses int'rest in said game complete."

"Indeed."

"Certain and sure. Never saw anything like it."

"How do you account for it?"

"The Cap'n's got cards up his sleeve. Maybe I'm wrong, and maybe I'm right; but, anyway, it's got something to do with these Injun folks hereabouts."

Padre Osuna was all attention. "Why do you think so?"

"Well, Reverend, it's the result of my observin's."

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir. Cap'n thinks this country should be cultivated. Talks free on this point. Naturally, Injuns will do the harvestin'. Naturally, again, the Cap'n will get his share of the harvest."

Father Osuna looked steadily at Brown. "You think Captain Farquharson would burden our Indians still further? Have they not been already plundered and cast out? Captain Farquharson's—our government could not contemplate making their peonage more complete. It is impossible."

Brown, slowly moving from side to side in his chair, eyed the padre. "Reckon 'twon't hurt 'em to work a sight more than they do. Our niggers in the South hustle and it does 'em good, besides creatin' wealth."

The friar paced nervously up and down the little room. "My poor children have been deprived of their own; the labor of their hands is being exploited; the welfare of their souls is forgotten. Am I helping to forge their fetters stronger? God forbid."

Brown arose and picked up his hat from the floor. "O, the Cap'n's a pretty good fellow, but smart, you see! He won't treat these 'ere natives worse than the next one."

The friar did not heed him. "This province goes to England, doubtless. If my little ones are oppressed, I'll appear before the queen and demand their rights. I'll claim my privilege of speaking in the House of Commons. The plagues of Egypt will fall on a land which permits such infamy."

"Excuse me, Reverend, I'll be going."

"O, good-day, my friend. Remember, 'Yes.' Shall I write it, or will you remember it?"

"I can recollect it all right. Good-day, Reverend."

Brown made his way toward the lodge. "Well, this 'ere does beat all Harry." He paused and looked around the courtyard. "Well, this 'ere *does* beat all Harry! England, hey? Well, by gosh! Not much! Big game! Big game! I attend my own business pretty much, but here is the time for bein' nosy."

The porter opened the gate for him to pass out.

"I'm going' to see the 'seenyore' across the way, then I start for an interview with the Cap'n," spoke Brown to himself.

Filipo admitted him at the Mendoza gate and brought him to the Administrator.

"Ah! Señor Brown, a moment's chat with you."

"I'd rather talk than eat."

"You shall do both."

A peon brought in refreshments.

"My good Brown, it is wiser that you stay here to-night."

"Simply can't do it. One reason is, the Cap'n's business. The other is, my own business."

"At any rate, partake of the food and wine. You can the better go on your journey."

Brown did as invited. After a moment he said: "Aren't some folks doin' more or less pull-hauling toward makin' California English territory?"

"It is true. Haven't you known it for some time?"

"Well, I should say not!" contemptuously.

"Your preferences are not English?"

"My family," emphatically, "has spilled too much blood fighting 'em, for that. Not," apologetically, "but what some pretty good Britishers exist; but if anybody gets this country, it's Uncle Sam."

"Have you spoken in this way to the Captain?"

"Haven't got round to it yet. You bet I do before this time to-morrow. Then I strike the long trail back to old Missouri, either on ship or on shank's mare."

"If you leave your present employment at any time, I wish you would apply to me before going farther. Well, here comes my daughter."

Carmelita greeted the American cordially. "I am delighted to see you in my father's house."

"I reckon it's a good place to be in. Wish I could stay longer, but I'm anxious to get to Monterey."

He was obdurate to Mendoza's urging him to remain as his guest till more could be learned as to the renegades.

"I can travel by night along a trail I know. They won't see I'm not one of themselves. All men look alike in the dark."

Mendoza, greatly reluctant, allowed Brown to be off. He sent a strong guard of fighting peons with him.

"Reckon it's the proper caper to travel in style now I'm a landed proprietor. Gosh! Wouldn't my dad be proud to see me now!"

"When you come to this house you come to your own," the host had insisted at parting.

"Mr. Mendoza is a tolerable generous old gent," Brown remarked to the leader of peons who rode by his side.

"No sabe, señor."

"Well, your ignorance is thick enough to be cut with a knife. Hey?"

"No sabe, señor."

"Well," resignedly, "that is about all I've been able to get out of men like you for months."

They were presently in San José. The pueblo was in an almost hysterical state. Morando had drawn with him nearly all the men capable of bearing arms. Rumors were flying about that the Spanish force had been cut to pieces and that Yoscolo was about to descend on the country.

Brown did not understand a word of what was being said. He insisted on starting for Monterey. The peon leader ordered his men to detain him by force.

"Gosh darn yer! Gosh darn yer!" the American shouted. "Leggo my horse! Leggo my horse, I say!"

He loosed both feet from the stirrups and kicked lustily. The natives grasped his legs and hung on like pendant weights despite the rear of the mount. He cut about him with his riding-whip. The peons literally swarmed over him, pinioning his arms from front and behind, meanwhile shouting objections, curses, explanations in mingled Spanish and Indian.

"Shut off your gibberish! Shut off your gibberish, I say! I've got to light out o' here. Get off my back! I've got to get the Cap'n," Brown yelled.

"I'm here, Brown."

Farquharson had ridden up unobserved.

"I heard things were stirring around here and I came to find out about it," he continued. "I knew I should meet you on the way."

The peons released Brown at a word from the Englishman.

"These men were saying you must stay here and help defend the women and children."

"Cap', I'm mighty glad to see you. Well, what about the women and children?"

"It will not be necessary. Yoscolo has been bested. The fight is over, and the wounded are already nearing the outskirts of the pueblo here."

"All well and good. Now, Cap', the padre's word to you is 'Yes.'"

"I understand, Brown."

"Now I have a word."

"Very well."

Brown dismounted and came close to Farquharson. "Are you aimin' to turn California over to the British?"

The Captain smiled broadly. "Now, see here, Brown, we've got along famously for months. You haven't asked questions and haven't suffered any loss by not doing so. Now let things run along the same old way. You've been useful to me. I'll see you get a great deal more than the money I've paid you month by month."

"Cap', you can explain away things about the best of any man I ever saw; but this here is principle with me. There isn't any explaining it away. As I said, I don't care a durn for this country. It's too fur out. But if I help anybody get it, that anybody is Uncle Sam."

"Now, Brown, that's sentiment. Your Uncle Sam doesn't want the country. If he does, why hasn't he made it his own long ago? The truth is, the United States already has more territory than it knows what to do with. England can use California to splendid advantage. The people here are crying for her to come. Brown, her coming is inevitable."

"Perhaps so. Just the same, I don't put my shoulder to her wheel and push her in here. No, sir!"

Farquharson placed his hand on Brown's arm. "See here, my friend, I don't forget you risked your life for me that afternoon in Monterey."

"That's all right, Cap'. I'll remark here, there's nothing personal to you in my present position."

"Well, stay with me. Ask no questions, and I'll see you have a grant of land here twenty times the size of your average Missouri farm."

"Not if I'm to help you or anyone to make this place over to England. Whatever I've done in that way previous was without my knowledge."

"Brown, we shall leave our hill-camp immediately and live in Monterey. You will have nothing to do but carry messages for me. Stay on, now, like a good fellow, and in a half dozen years you can visit your old Missouri home as a rich man."

"No use, Cap'. I've never been so sorry to quit a man, but I have to go."

"Well, Brown, if being a landed proprietor doesn't appeal to you, why not stay on the basis of the friendship that has grown between us?"

"I'm your friend all right, Cap', but I can't do a thing that would make my old pop back in Missouri ashamed of me. Don't ask that."

O'Donnell appeared from somewhere. Powder-stains streaked his hair, face, and beard. His clothing was cut and torn, but his step was steady and firm. His eyes looked straight into Farquharson's. The Englishman returned him look for look.

"Brown, you know where to find me." The Captain held out his hand.

Brown shook it warmly. "Good-by, Cap'."

Farquharson mounted his horse and moved slowly away. O'Donnell and Brown were left alone.

"You and your 'Cap'n' have been having words?" O'Donnell asked.

"Sounded like it, did it?"

"I presume you do not know he is in the province for political reasons?"

"If I was of an inquiring turn of mind, I'd ask what business it is of yours whether I do or not."

O'Donnell laughed. "No business at all, friend Brown—no business at all. I happen to be a lover of the Stars and Stripes; consequently, no friend of Captain Farquharson's political intrigues here. Do you understand?"

"More or less. It's the Stars and Stripes for me too, every time!"

"You are a likely-looking man. Since you have left Farquharson I'll offer you place with me. You will find it active, full of excitement, and with pay not small."

"Thank you, Mr. Irishman, but I don't intend to work any more for strangers. It's like buying a pig in a sack. 'Seenyore' Mendoza offered me two things this afternoon, one was his house and farm, t'other was a job. I'll think I'll take the job. Otherwise, it's me for old Missouri."

O'Donnell again laughed. "Very well, then, take service with Señor Mendoza. I'll ride to Mission San José later in the evening, and I intend to call on Mendoza myself. Would be glad of your company, if you'll come along with me."

The wounded began to come in on improvised litters. O'Donnell and Brown gave their assistance toward bringing them into comfortable quarters. Many of the men did not return from the field of La Cuesta de los Gatos. There was lamentation in hacienda house and in peon cot that night in the valley of Santa Clara.

"There's nothing more for us to do here, Brown. Are

you ready to start for Mendoza's?" It was midnight and the wounded had been cared for.

"All right. I'll go with you."

They set out, the fighting peons following, their ranks sadly decimated by the afternoon fight.

"Blamed sorry to leave the Cap'n," Brown volunteered. "He's a decent chap, and smart—well, about the best educated man I ever saw—and spunky—I'll never forget how he half raised up from that stair-landing in Monterey, like a shot weasel standing off a pack of dogs. Fire was just spitting from his eyes—just spitting!"

"But his politics," O'Donnell interpolated.

"His politics ain't mine," Brown sighed.

They rode on in silence.

CHAPTER XIX

SEÑORA VALENTINO AND CAPTAIN MORANDO CONTINUE CONVERSATION

"SAUL has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands. I greet you, Captain Morando."

Morando bowed.

"A chair, Captain. My good brother-in-law the Colonel Barcelo awakes soon, I'm sure."

"If you do not mind, Señora Valentino, let us walk up and down this wide veranda. I think you were doing so a moment ago."

"Quite right, Señor Captain."

The señora and the soldier were on a long balcony in the second story of the Barcelo mansion. It ran along the street side of the house and across one end. The cool wind from the Monterey Bay crept along the street, mounted to the porch, and breathed gently there. The leaves crinkled under the chill and the flower petals shrank within themselves.

"Benito had strict orders to keep awake and bring you here the moment you arrived, Captain."

"The watchful sentinel was indeed awake and lost no time in showing me here, señora."

"At midnight I left the Colonel and his council. They had just finished reading the dispatches you sent. They expected you and your prisoners along shortly. They

were to wait for you in these chairs, but I fancy the cool morning invited them within. I fancy, again, one could easily find the Colonel and his council." She shrugged and laughed. They paused just opposite a wide-open door. Within were several men, in easy chairs, fast asleep. Colonel Barcelo, especially, was breathing stoutly. Two soldiers, evidently detailed as orderlies, were on guard. They rose from their chairs, saluted the Captain, and again seated themselves, all silently as if in pantomime.

The señora and the Captain continued their walk.

"I expected to arrive here much sooner, but had difficulty in getting enough horses. We were obliged to sequester a number from the Mission Santa Clara. Many mounts, as well as many men, were killed or maimed in the fight, and we had nearly two hundred prisoners to transport to the military prison here."

"Ah, Captain, my heart rejoices in your victory and in your safety. Do you soldiers ever think that while you are away fighting we women are home inactive, save in prayer, waiting, longing for word of you, yet dreading to hear it when it comes? In the rush of battle, amigo, does one little thought ever go back to these waiting ones?"

"My good señora, not a moment since I left you two days ago has the thought of one woman been absent from me. Yesterday, in that desperate hand-to-hand fight, time after time we were hard pressed, and the memory-picture of her moved my soul and placed a giant's strength in my arm. The men caught my spirit."

"The thought of one woman, Captain?"

"Yes, señora. It may be women little realize the part they have in bringing to success many a perilous enterprise."

"It is good to hear you say that, my Captain."

"Señora, often when we are most occupied there runs in us an undercurrent of thought which reaches a surer conclusion, perhaps, than could our conscious reason. In these past busy hours my deeper self has lived again and again in the words you and I spoke that morning in the reception room below. When opportunity comes I shall give you further confidences of my heart."

"I am greatly complimented by what you tell me."

"Had I but time that morning I should have gone to greater length. My dear señora, a common bond unites you and me. Providence, I doubt not, has brought us together in understanding, after all these years, that we may help each other."

"Captain, I—I feel—I need help. And you—you——"

"My good señora, I shall give help as I can. From you I ask the same consideration. That morning I was about to say to you——"

The church bell rang. The hour was six, the time for the morning Angelus.

"The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary," Colonel Barcelo's voice repeated half sleepily. The soldiers and the council all joined in the morning prayer.

"I must have nodded," the Colonel added. "A moment ago I was the only one awake around here, but I didn't care to disturb these civilians who aren't accustomed

to night duty," looking indulgently at his council. "But as for the soldiers," glaring at the orderlies, "why, they simply are no soldiers at all. Many's the time I've gone eighty hours without sleep, eighty hours, señors! and never closing an eye. Why, bless my soul! here is Morando, a trifle dusty and smoke-stained, but still fresh as a rose. Congratulation, good Captain! I'm glad you rubbed out that rascally Indian. Why, here's Señora Valentino also! I suppose the Angelus bell aroused you. Well, I was awake. Sit down, Morando. Take this easy chair."

The Colonel arose and walked about the room. "Well, tell us about the fight—I'm beginning to get hungry."

"Lieutenant Mesa, who came to you last night, told you, I'm sure, all there is to tell. One of the prisoners, however, told me something interesting about the Americano O'Donnell and Yoscolo."

"Ah! O'Donnell," from Señora Valentino. "Let us hear about it."

"I wondered why Yoscolo deserted the coast range whence he could have easily reached the high Sierras and safety," began Morando. "This Indian prisoner told me that Yoscolo abandoned the Sierras for fear of O'Donnell himself."

"For fear of O'Donnell!" Barcelo ejaculated in contempt. "That Indian was simply talking nonsense. I've seen this O'Donnell around here—some nondescript fellow. Besides, O'Donnell wasn't in the Sierras at all, but right along with you. Well, we'll all feel better when we've had some breakfast."

"What further did your informant say, Captain Morando?" Señora Valentino persisted.

"Yoscolo thought O'Donnell had gone to the far-western plains. The Americano is most influential there with high chiefs. So, our Yoscolo intended to raid the missions and haciendas, hold Spanish men and women for ransom and make his way with the proceeds to Northern Mexico, all before O'Donnell should return. He knew the Americano could overwhelm him with those plains natives, if he wished. But O'Donnell had not yet gone to the plains. Yoscolo only became aware of this after he began raiding. Accordingly, he left the neighborhood of danger, and was on his way along the coast to Mexico, for safety, when we overtook him at Los Gatos."

"Simply preposterous! Simply preposterous! what the Indian told you," puffed Barcelo. "Well, it was as good a way as any to pass a weary journey. But let's go to breakfast."

"Whither went O'Donnell after the action at Los Gatos?" still persisted Señora Valentino.

"After giving aid to the wounded in San José he rode to the house of Señor Mendoza."

Señor Barcelo appeared on the veranda.

"Crisostimo, will you kindly tell our amigos that breakfast will be ready in fifteen minutes? Silvia and you, Crisostimo, help me show them rooms where they may prepare. Sister, love, have a care for your arm. Come, amigos come."

The guests were soon disposed to their rooms.

As they left the breakfast table, Señora Valentino

said to Morando: "Captain, shall we not continue the conversation interrupted by the ringing of the Angelus?"

"With great pleasure, my señora."

"Let us go into the courtyard garden."

Colonel Barcelo and his councilors returned to the upper veranda.

"I'll have to be at the castle when Morando turns these prisoners over to me formally, and withdraws his own men. I'll see to it that horses will be there for us, and we'll go out on a tour of inspection," Barcelo said.

"How softly the morning light comes into the patio, Captain!" as they were sitting together under a locust tree.

"I can scarcely realize that the same sun shines here and on that scene of death of few hours' ride away. As I sit here with you in this quiet and peace the other seems a dream, an awful dream, señora."

"But you are with me, and yesterday has gone the way of all other days that are past. The future, if we are willing, may hold many happy years for us."

"I pray so, my good señora."

The señora lowered her eyes, and bowed gently.

"Our lives are empty; yours, because it has never been filled. Hence there is greater hope for you than for me."

"What do you mean, Captain?"

"You have been frank with me. I will be the same with you. Fate brought me to far-away California. I chanced to meet the one who from the first filled my heart, my soul. I sang beneath her window. She

laughed. Sometimes I thought she encouraged me. Sometimes, again, she flouted me. Nevertheless, I dared hope she cared for me. Now I know she did not."

The Captain paused in thought.

The señora did not speak.

Finally Morando continued: "More than once I tried to tell her I loved her, but she held me at arm's length. The night of the baile, at Mission San José, I believed my opportunity had come. She listened to me, favorably I was sure; but there was an interruption from her partner for the next dance. When again she was alone I pressed my suit. It was in vain. She seemed changed —offended. Yesterday I was at her father's house. I talked with her. At first she listened most graciously; then, in some way, I offended her still more. I am speaking of the Señorita Carmelita Mendoza, señora."

"Captain," came slowly from the señora, "we were speaking the other day of the face of the window pane in old Pilar Convent."

"I shall never forget, my dear señora."

"That face called in you to the primeval love every man has for an ideal woman. For her your heart had been unconsciously searching. The Señorita Mendoza seemed to you to fulfill that ideal. You went to her with words of love. She could not reciprocate. Does it not mean that you must look beyond the beautiful child of Señor Mendoza for the realization of your heart's desires?"

Morando looked straight at the señora. "Señora Valentino, I love the Señorita Mendoza with every fiber of my being. I shall never cease to love her. I could

not bear to stay here and see her the wife of another man. Therefore I have resolved to go away.

"But, my dear Captain, time has worked wonders. It may do so for you."

Morando shook his head. "Nothing can alter my love for the señorita doña."

"Ah, Captain! You believe that the señorita doña fulfills your ideal; yet you cannot wed her. There may be another destined to fit into the high place to which you, not knowing, have called this child. Think, my friend, may it not be so?"

"It cannot be. Señora Valentino, now that I have lost Señorita Mendoza, the memory-pictures of her come to me with tenfold intensity. I saw her, as if near me, on the battlefield. I dreamed of her in the short hours of sleep that have been mine since I last saw her. Yes, dear friend, even now, as you sit by, with words of comfort for me, I see plainly the face and form of Carmelita Mendoza. She seems even more present to me than are you."

The señora arose.

He stood beside her. "I thank you for listening to me. Wheresoever I may be I shall never forget you."

"Let us again be seated."

"Thank you, señora."

"I soon return to Europe," the señora said. "My work here is really done. Great Britain gains another province, and will be correspondingly thankful to her who was useful in bringing about the transfer. Good Captain, I have other claims on Great Britain's good will. Should you desire some important post on the

continent, or elsewhere, I can see to it that the diplomatic interest of England is used to secure it for you. Since you feel you must leave here, my Captain, return to Europe, take what good fortune sends you, and again you will be the knight of the Lady of the Window Pane, and she will rejoice in the victories you win for her."

Morando lifted the señora's hand to his lips. "Do not think I am unmindful, kind friend, of your goodness to me. I appreciate it most sincerely. But, señora, I could not accept your generous offices."

"But, Captain, there are many aspirants for the high places. Worth is but one of the requirements. Another is to have a friend at court. I can point out to you the short paths to preferment, and can assist you. I soon return to Europe. Why not you do the same?"

"Again I thank you, señora. Europe is too crowded; therefore I left it. I could not accept preferment there, or here, unless I had earned it. South America offers to me the most inviting field at this time. Before long I shall turn my steps in that direction."

"You are diffident, Captain, and overscrupulous. Europe is the world. Go there. Accept what offers itself, and you will find your capabilities are equal to the task."

Again Morando shook his head. "Señora Valentino, there is one thing that I would like to ask you to do for me."

"Yes, Captain."

"I seem to make matters worse by speaking to Señorita Mendoza myself. Would you go to her and tell her for me that—O, that—that I didn't know of her en-

gagement to Peralta, and that I had no wish to annoy her, and all that? Explain it all to her. You will know better what to say than I can tell you—only tell her that, no matter what, I shall always love her truly, and that I shall never love anyone else." He bowed his head in his hands, overcome by his own thoughts.

She arose quickly, her eyes striking fire. He was too preoccupied to notice. Her hands clenched and then relaxed, in excess of nervous tension.

"You wish me to tell the señorita that you love her, that you meant no offense in so telling her——"

Colonel Barcelo's loud voice called, "Morando! Morando! I say, Morando!"

The Captain aroused himself. "Here, Colonel. Here in the garden."

The Colonel rushed into the patio, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

"What do you suppose that Stanislaus of yours has done now, Captain? What do you suppose he has done, I say?"

"What has he done, Colonel?"

"Done! Why, my council and I were to inspect some irrigating ditches in the hills, to see the dams were well built and all that, so the town would be in no danger of inundation. Do you understand?" The Colonel glared around. "Well, the horses were tied outside the castle for the use of myself and my council in this work of inspection—in this work of inspection, do you understand? Well, your men looked bedraggled and tired, Morando. I didn't wait for you to come, but relieved them and put my own soldiers on guard."

"But the prisoners——" Morando began.

"That's just what I'm coming to. Do be patient! In the exchange of guards some of the prisoners walked out—coolest thing I ever heard of—took rifles from the racks, and actually mounted the horses in front of the castle, and rode away! I tell you, *rode away!*"

Barcelo paused for breath. "I saw them going and gave the alarm," he went on, after a moment. "Yes, I saw that rascal Stanislaus riding—riding away to safety. I saw it myself—I saw——"

Further words failed the Colonel.

The sound of cavalry was heard in the street.

"The pursuit!" cried Morando and started for the patio gate.

"Yes, yes, the pursuit!" panted Barcelo and rolled after him.

Señora Valentino listened while Morando's clarion voice ordered the movements of the cavalry, and heard the noise of the horses' hoofs die out in a distant rumble.

"Our Colonel was out of breath and could not order the march of his men, therefore our valiant Captain does it for him!" she thought. Then she smiled bitterly. "I have laid bare my very soul before that man, and he could see nothing. He saw only that child, Carmelita Mendoza. What fatality is it that closes the eyes of the one man to me and makes him see only this miss of the province?"

Again, after a little: "Yes, I'll see his señorita for him, tell her he loves her, and doesn't mean his blunderings. Yes, I'll tell her. The fool! Yes, I'll——"

The señora walked away, her eyes glittering.

CHAPTER XX

BITTER SWEET

"CARMELITA, little heart, how is it with thee?"

"Well, señora doña; many thanks. And thou?"

"As you see." Señora Valentino held up her injured wrist neatly bandaged.

"I could not allow many days to go by without riding over to thank you and your father, the noble Señor Administrator, for the wonderful night of enjoyment you gave us in that grand baile. The thought of it fairly possesses me now, as it was some beautiful dream and I was scarce awake from sleep. A thousand thanks, señorita doña, to you and to Señor Mendoza. I hope the señor is well."

Señora Valentino and Carmelita were standing within the reception room, near the open doorway, of the Mendoza hacienda house. The grateful coolness of the hall was in strong contrast to the heat of the summer sun which lay over grounds and house.

"You are good, señora. My father has been away since yesterday. I shall make your words known to him on his return. On my own part I thank you for them."

Señora Valentino placed her well arm around the girl. "The beautiful hostess of a beautiful home is the Señorita Mendoza."

"Will you not step within, señora? All that you see is yours."

Carmelita moved toward the inner room, thus disengaging the señora's arm.

"With much pleasure, señorita."

Shortly the two were seated.

"How refreshing is this inner air," remarked the señora. "The afternoon brings warmth and drowsiness, but this is delightful."

"Modesta," from Carmelita to her maid who appeared in response to the tinkle of a bell, "some tea and dulces at once."

Without delay the refreshments appeared.

"Sugar, señora mia?" the young hostess holding up a delicate gold spoon. "Yes. And dulces? Modesta, take this to Señora Valentino. Have a care for her bandaged wrist."

"Mille gracias, little hostess mine." Then, sipping the tea and nibbling the cakes, "These are delicious after the ride, señorita doña."

"Have you come far, señora?"

"From the hacienda house of Señor Calderon, near San José pueblo. Merely a matter of two hours or so, but I seem to tire easily since my arm was injured. Still, what of it? Soon it is well and then forgotten. It is the way of unpleasant things, señorita. They slip away and we know them no more. Well, if it were otherwise, perhaps half of the world would be enemy to the other half."

She laughed merrily and the hostess politely joined.

"Yet, in forgetting the unfortunate incident I would

not, if I could, forget the kindly ministrations of our dear friend Captain Morando. We were riding along in the romantic coolness of early dawn—absorbed in other things, you know—not noting or caring"—smiling knowingly into the other's face—"when that dreadful creature assailed me with its beak and claws." The señora turned away with a little shudder. Then, as if half absently: "But our soldier lad—how gently he cared for me. When I awakened—my head pillowed against his breast as a child lying close to its mother's heart." Starting up, "But, Carmelita mia, I must not distress you. I am an unworthy disciple of my own creed, for one minute I advocate forgetting troubles, then I straightway recount them; but then, you see," looking down, "my troubles in this particular were most sweetly intermingled." She laughed and immediately changed the subject. "When do you expect the señor your noble father to return?"

"I do not know the time of his return. señora."

"Has he gone far?"

"When he left he did not tell me his destination, so I fancy he has not gone to any great distance."

"Ah, well! We women wait while the men travel forth to dare and do. It's the way of the world."

The woman and the girl sat facing each other. The closed shutters excluded the sun, but the warm light of a California summer day glowed in the room. Less than five years divided the ages of the matron and the maid. At first sight it might seem that the difference was greater. The tightly fitting riding-habit of the señora added a maturity to her look which was not

usual, while the looser afternoon gown of the girl gave her an uncommonly youthful appearance. Carmelita was somewhat taller than the señora and more slender.

"I hope your arm has not greatly inconvenienced you," from Carmelita, by a strange perversity reverting to the matter so lightly dismissed by the señora a moment ago.

"Yes, and no, señorita. The wound is sometimes painful, but the solicitude of those about me shows me I have a place in their hearts—a pleasant knowledge—an anodyne, so to speak." She put her hand up to her head in a childish way which was very becoming. Her oval face beamed with friendliness, while her brown eyes smiled sweetly. She was a very handsome young woman, apparently very friendly and very genuinely interested in the girl before her. Carmelita was not insensible to her charm.

"You have a place in the hearts of many, señora. Surely you could never doubt it."

"Well, perhaps not. Still, one wishes outward expression of inward regard. Otherwise, how can one be sure it exists?"

Señorita Mendoza said nothing.

"Then, too, we wish, naturally, to know just how a certain very few stand toward us—sometimes just how a certain one person feels toward us. Now, there are some who are very good to all. Their hearts are kind naturally, and they give generous words and deeds to anyone who needs them. Is it not so, señorita?"

"I believe you speak truly, señora doña."

The señora's laugh was merry as she said: "A wise

puss you are. Well, this generous, free-for-all kindness is good, but not entirely satisfactory. Each person has an ideal, and when we see that ideal realized in some concrete person we want that person to be good to us alone. Do you not agree, señorita?"

"It would be presuming in me to contradict the señora."

"Ah! I said you are a wise puss, my señorita; and so you are, very wise. Well, wisdom is the heritage of our old Castilian families. Truly, our fathers have thought of much and have done much in the generations that have been lived. What wonder if the rich, pure gold of experience falls to us, the heirs of the past, from the melting-furnace of departed years. What think you, little lady?"

"Your thoughts rise above me, Señora Valentino."

The señora laughed and bowed, as if in acceptance of some compliment.

The peona Modesta appeared in the doorway, curtseying several times. "May I speak, señorita doña?"

"Speak, Modesta."

"The post surgeon from San José is here to see the wounded soldiers in our infirmary. He wishes to leave some directions with you."

"What soldiers does the peona mean, señorita?"

"Some disabled men Captain Morando left with us the other day."

"O, indeed! My husband was an officer, and I am always much interested in soldiers, especially those injured on the field of battle. In San José yesterday I visited the improvised hospitals. I should like greatly

to see the men you have here and express my appreciation of their good work."

"Why, certainly, señora. Will you excuse me for a few minutes now while I speak to the doctor?"

The señora listened to the sound of voices in the corridor. A demure look stole over her face. She arched her shoulders coquettishly.

"Yes, I'll tell the Señorita Mendoza that Captain Morando loves her deeply and meant no harm when he proposed to her. I'll do just as the gallant Captain asked me to do. The fool!"

A look of weariness possessed her almost immediately. "O, this life! this life! Political intrigue! and counter intrigue! all heartless and unfeeling as a surgeon's knife. God of my heart! why has destiny discovered such a groove for me? And yet—and yet—what would life be without it—without ambition? A body without a soul."

After a moment she arose, her hands clinching.

"The gallant Captain shall come to me and sue for my love, if for no other reason than because I have humbled myself before him. I will it! I will it! As for this puss—this wise puss—"

The señorita's steps came quickly along the corridor. She found the señora sitting in the chair, as she had left her, to all intents musing the time away.

"The Captain Morando still pursues Stanislaus, the elusive—so I heard this morning in San José. My brother-in-law, the Colonel Barcelo, has returned to Monterey in disgust, having given up the chase. You know the old saying, señorita, 'The braver in war, the

keener in love.' The Captain is both a brave soldier and a keen lover." The señora's full-throated, musical laugh seemed out of place.

Carmelita was very quiet as she asked: "What do you mean, señora doña?"

"Why, dear child, I mean that a braver man has never drawn sword in the Californias, and surely no one doubts his earnestness in making love."

The girl's face flushed.

"Did you know that the Captain and I first knew each other about ten years ago? No? The inception of our acquaintance was quite interesting. Would you like to hear about it?"

"If the señora wishes to tell of it."

"Well, after all, not so much to tell—a schoolgirl and schoolboy flirtation." She sighed very prettily as she spoke. "I was fourteen, he eighteen."

"I knew that you and Captain Morando had met in Spain, but I did not think it so long ago as that."

"Yes, ten years, ten long years," opening her eyes in mock seriousness. "For three years this went on—three whole years, then—"

"Excuse me, please, but some of the physician's orders are to be carried out at once. I must send a peona to see about it. May I leave you alone again for a few moments?"

"Certainly, querida, certainly. The story will keep. I also have another story of love to tell you. We shall be quite sentimental."

The girl stepped into the corridor and gave some orders to a servant. The young peona wondered

that her mistress's face was stern and her tone sharp.

"Now, señorita mia, time is going, and we will pass over my own little romance, and I will begin with the other tale of love." This from the señora when Carmelita had returned. "Are you ready to listen?"

The girl so signified.

"From speaking of our—our youthful flirtation—the good Captain came to tell me of the grand passion of his heart."

"Señora Valentino, I mean no discourtesy to a guest, but why do you tell me this?"

"Because, my dear, it concerns you most especially. The other day, in Monterey, Captain Morando and I were speaking most intimately, as becomes old friends. What harm? The Captain confided in me; nay more. He gave me a message to bring to you. 'I now love the Señorita Carmelita Mendoza,' he said. 'I pressed my suit the night of the baile. At first she listened to me. I had heart. I had courage. Then she changed. She flouted me. Something had offended her, I know not what. Will you not see her, the beautiful Carmelita, and explain to her I meant no harm. I—"

The señorita sprang to her feet, her breast heaving.

"Señora Valentino, I cannot listen to you. Even though you are a guest of this house, I cannot—"

"Nay, nay, little child. Don't be so hasty. I am commissioned to set matters right between you two. Be seated now, my señorita, and hear me to the end. Please be seated. I am bungling in my mode of expression, I know. Pray be seated."

Carmelita took her chair once more.

The señora leaned toward her confidingly, her brown eyes looking straight at the girl, and her voice low and sweet.

"Now, I'll try again, little one. The Captain said to me, in effect, that at first the señorita listened to him the night of the baile; she allowed him to hold her hand; her eyes dropped. She—"

"Señora Valentino, I request that this conversation cease, and that you do not again mention to me the name of Captain Morando."

"But, my dear señorita—"

"I request that you do as I ask, señora."

"I can, of course, but do as you wish. I assure you, it is not a pleasant task for me to speak of these matters. It is only from an urgent desire to serve my friend who asked this of me. The other day some one, in speaking of Captain Morando, said that it is easy for young men to fall in love; and, indeed, to fall out of it—but, away! those threadbare sayings! The heart of Don Alfredo is loving and warm. Do I not know it? Had it not been for the dashing Colonel Valentino—" Then suddenly, "O, señorita, a man cannot forgive everything even in a woman he loves. If you do not listen to his suit it may be too late, and you will live to regret, even as I—" She stopped, apparently absorbed in thought of the past.

The girl arose. "Señora Valentino—" she began.

The señora extended her unbandaged hand. "I have tried to perform a difficult and a distasteful task. I trust some good will come of it. I will say but one

thing more: Do not trifle too far with Captain Morando."

"Captain Morando is nothing to me; nor can he ever be. I would not wish it otherwise."

"Well, señorita, I have fulfilled my promise. I have done my duty. Shall we now visit the wounded soldiers?"

"If you so desire, Señora Valentino."

The two passed out of the house, and across the courtyard to the hospital department of the Mendoza hacienda.

Five of Captain Morando's men lay on cots in a large, well-lighted ward. Señora Valentino went from one to another making inquiries and speaking words of encouragement. One of the men had been in Morando's company in the North Africa campaigns, and had taken service again under him in California.

"I regret, señora and señorita, that I am disabled, and cannot be with my Captain in this present fighting," he said.

"No doubt, good man," replied Señora Valentino.

"My Captain was the handsomest and the best man in General Guerrero's division," the soldier went on.

"You are loyal," commented the señora.

"With good reason. I have followed him into the thick of battle. I have followed him through the enemy's camp; and," laughing, "I have followed him when he galloped across country to tinkle his guitar beneath the window of the beautiful one—"

"In Spain, or North Africa?" interrupted the señora jokingly.

"I tell no tales out of school," rejoined the man, continuing the banter.

"You interest me, as all soldiers do," from the señora. "Are you not one of the picked fighting men whom your Captain keeps near him for emergencies?"

"Yes, señora. The morning Captain Morando was called from his visit to Colonel Barcelo, in Monterey, he had made me first sergeant. Thus I held his horse, Señora Valentino, while he was within speaking with you. You see, I know, kind lady. Benito, the porter, told me—"

"Hush, man; remember you are wounded."

"Benito told me," the soldier insisted. "Benito told me—" he laughed.

"Ah! wounded men have strange dreams. I doubt not, you have been dreaming."

"I think you have talked already as much as the physician's orders will allow," interposed Carmelita.

"Of that I am sure," agreed the señora. "Come, señorita doña, let us be going. Now," shaking her finger at the soldier, "see that your dreams follow a more orderly fashion."

"But," Benito said, "soon the San José Captain leads our beautiful señora to the padre. The Captain rides much beside her—"

"Not another word, Sergeant. Now, I bid you good afternoon."

She walked toward the door.

"Forgive me, señora," called the sergeant, anxiously. "Benito spoke as if everyone knew already. Maybe I

wouldn't have presumed to say anything—leastwise to yourself—if that blow on the head the other day hadn't loosened my tongue as well as my teeth—"

"Not another word," from Carmelita, firmly.

"Señorita," spoke Señora Valentino, when once more they were in the courtyard, "fate seems to keep Captain Morando's name before us."

Carmelita did not reply. The woman and the girl walked slowly along the broad gravel walk toward the entrance of the hacienda house.

"Our gay and handsome Captain may have lost his heart and found it a score of times. Quién sabe? What would you? It is the way of men. But what need have I to tell a beautiful señorita the way of the cavalier?" The señora smiled bewitchingly.

Carmelita bit her lip. Color rose to her face, and her eyes glowed. She made no reply.

"Suppose a cavalier boasts of his conquests when, at some general meeting of the departmental officers, each one, made merry by the occasion, has taken a glass or two of wine above his custom. What of it? Was not my husband, Colonel Valentino, an officer? A brave heart he had, and a loving one. Yet—" The señora laughed.

Still no word came from Carmelita.

"Allow me to say that Captain Morando now loves you, and you only. What of the past? You have his heart now; and I know he has yours. Why not?" Another bewitching smile.

Carmelita continued walking by the señora's side, not speaking.

"If, then, you do not intend to allow the Captain to continue further his courtship, take his word, passed by him through me, that he meant no harm."

From the walk to the house the girl had adroitly turned their steps toward the courtyard gate. Filipo, the porter, pressed a lever. The gate swung ajar. Fifty paces away, comfortably waiting under some shade trees, were the señora's attendant peons. At a word from Filipo they sprang to horse and rode to the gate in jiglike trot.

"Now, Señora Valentino," the girl said, "I shall leave word with my servants that, if you call again, they are to announce to you that I am not at home."

A peon had brought the señora's horse. Kneeling he held the stirrup for her. Nimbly she found her seat. The animal pranced gracefully from side to side. She swung him toward the gate.

"Adios!" she called to Carmelita.

The señorita's trim, straight figure was disappearing behind the slowly closing gate.

"A thousand thanks, my courteous hostess."

Señora Valentino made her way along the San José road. For several hundred yards she rode in deep thought, a storm of counter currents rushing over her.

"Anyway," she reflected, "Morando's course of true love has not been made more smooth by my visit this day." The accompanying laugh was not a mirthful one.

CHAPTER XXI

A FEW DIPLOMATIC TOUCHES

"BUENOS noches, señores."

Two men sitting by a fire rose to their feet.

"Buenos noches," responded one of them. The men moved a little toward the newcomer, one of them limping considerably, as if injured.

"I say," came from the lame man, "perhaps this is some one our guide has sent in search of us."

"We'll soon see," replied the other, in English. Then in Spanish: "We are lost here in the forest. Can you tell us where we can find food and shelter for the night?"

"Of a surety, señor, of a surety," the stranger replied. "I am major-domo of Señor Miramonte's hacienda. This is his property here. The señor and his lady are out, but wayfarer guests are none the less welcome. I saw your fire and thought some vagrant peons had built it. We greatly dread forest and pasture fires this time of year. Come, señors, come with me."

"He offers us the hospitality of a rancho house."

"I'll be deuced glad for shelter anywhere," the injured man replied, both speaking in English. "I'm at home on a ship, but riding a stiff-backed horse with wooden legs is too much for me. Ugh! I'm sore as if

I'd been put in a sack and beaten with clubs. Besides, I'm actually seasick. Commodore, think of that! Seasick! All for riding a jointless, iron-jawed broncho."

The man addressed as "Commodore" laughed. "Maybe riding your horse over that twenty-foot precipice is a contributary cause to your soreness, Captain."

The horseman had dismounted and was carefully extinguishing the fire, treading on each separate ember until it was out.

"Gentlemen, will you come with me?" he asked, finally. "I'll bring you to your own."

"What does he say?" asked the one who had been called "Captain."

"He is offering a house after the Spanish custom."

"Well, indeed! One of the first things I do when I get on shipboard will be to learn Spanish."

The one riding moved away from the wide-branching oak, where the fire had been, out toward the open. It was bright starlight.

"Let the injured one ride my horse. I will show the path on foot. Come. It is not far to Señor Miramonte's house."

The Commodore interpreted this to his companion.

"If it isn't far I'd rather crawl than ride," the Captain replied. "Where in the world is the path? It's light enough, but I surely do not see any. Say, is that fellow an agent for a bandit or something like that? The pay of an American naval captain is such, you know——"

"Never fear, Hamilton," laughed the Commodore. "Your pay and mine combined, for a year, would be

hardly more than a bagatelle for one of these land-and-cattle barons, such as is Miramonte, I believe."

"You've been here before?"

"Yes, ten or a dozen years ago. Rode from Yerba Buena to San José along a road which I trust must be near here, though I couldn't find it to-day. Went from San José back to San Francisco harbor along the eastern side of the valley. Remember, Hamilton, what your name is for the present?"

"Certainly, I'm plain Smith."

"And I'm plain Jones."

They followed the man who was leading the horse. In the open they could see him easily. In the dense growths they followed by the sound. Captain Hamilton was becoming greatly fatigued when a number of well-lighted buildings came into view. Dogs barked and Indian men and women talked excitedly as the party approached.

A courtyard gate opened wide to receive them.

"Behold the bandits' cave, *Smith!*" said the Commodore.

"I see it, *Jones*," replied the injured man. "I declare, it looks good to me. Will the head bandit demand that we prove our identity, or something like that?"

"I forgot to tell you that the owner of the premises is away at present. The man who brought us here is major-domo, which might be translated, overseer. I fancy he is altogether in charge and will make us as comfortable as we could wish."

The major-domo gave his horse to a peon, then

waved his hand to the front door of the house. "Gentlemen, it is as I said before. What you see is yours. Enter your own."

"I'm willing," agreed Smith when he was told what had been said. "A bath and a comfortable bed appeal to me just now."

They were brought to large, airy chambers within. A hot tub-bath was prepared for Smith; while a peon, skillful in massaging, kneaded his aching muscles. The injury to his knee, sustained in falling, was rather severe. The massaging peon bound it tightly with various poultices of herbs.

"I say, man, that's too hot," Smith protested.

Jones grinned. "Perhaps the bandit's servant is preparing you like a trussed goose."

"I say, Commodore——"

"Jones, my friend."

"Very well, *Jones*. If this confounded thing were around your leg, you wouldn't laugh. You're my superior officer, and all that——"

"I'm *Jones*," the other said, emphatically.

"Pardon me Com——I mean, *Jones*. Oh! Ouch! he's taking those weeds right out of boiling water and tying them around my smashed knee. I say, man——"

The Indian paid no attention to his remonstrances or squirming.

"Why, Jones! Where did you get those clothes?"

Jones was attired in the regulation house-dress of the California grandee, from fluted shirt-front to silver-clasped shoes.

"Found them in my room, with a peon valet ready to

assist me into them. Doubtless you'll be treated the same way."

"Well! I'll admire myself. But my bandaged knee wouldn't fit into such trouserettes as you have on."

The bandaging was finished at last. The peon spoke to the patient in Spanish.

"What is he saying?"

"Says for you to go to bed soon. In the morning he will remove the bandages, and hopes your knee will be greatly improved."

"Go to bed. Well, the quarters are sumptuous enough. High-posted bed, mahogany bureaus—one, two, three of them; and chairs, mahogany too, and heavy enough for state occasions. It's all fine, if I only had a bite of something to eat."

The major-domo entered the room, several peons following him, carrying trays on which were steaming dishes.

Smith was quickly arrayed in a flannel dressing gown. A table was laid and moved over to his chair. Savory meats, vegetables, and fruits were ready. Wine was uncorked and placed at the hungry man's hand.

The major-domo gave some further orders to the peons, and then spoke to the traveler who understood Spanish. That worthy's eyes twinkled. "I'm invited to supper with the family, or the part of it in the house. I hope you'll enjoy your meal, and have a good rest to-night. The Indian surgeon says if necessary he'll use still hotter and stronger applications to-morrow."

Smith was comforting himself with the warm meal. His fellow traveler followed the major-domo along a

corridor, down a short flight of stairs, to a door which a peon within opened at their approach. The major-domo bowed low, and left the man standing at the door.

"In my son's absence I welcome you," said a very kindly voice. "I am Señor Miramonte's mother."

"I am delighted to greet you, señora."

"I regret your companion is injured and unable to dine with us."

"I trust he'll be well to-morrow."

"Señor—I do not know your name?"

"Er-r-Jones." His face flushed a little.

"Señor Jones, I wish to introduce you to my friend, Señora Valentino, who is also our guest to-night. Señora Valentino, our esteemed visitor, the Señor Jones."

Señora Valentino extended her hand to Jones. "Señor Jones, I am pleased to see you." A slow, deliberate smile lit up her features. "Am glad to meet you—here." Her low bow did not wholly cover the quizzical look which darted from her eyes.

They were ushered into a dining room where a table generously laid was before them.

"Señora Valentino," asked the hostess, "will you not take the head of the table?"

The señora complied.

"I am not very strong these days," the elderly lady explained, "and I am happy that so fair and clever a hand as Señora Valentino's is here to manage in serving the dinner."

Señora Valentino presided gracefully.

"Señor Jones," she said, with just a hint of emphasis on 'Jones,' "may I ask if you have been long in Alta California?"

"Well, no. In fact, only a few days or so."

The hour of dinner passed pleasantly. Places of interest were spoken of; men and events discussed. Spain, France, England, were passed in review. Señora Miramontes was European born. Her husband had been Spanish ambassador at the great capitals; and the splendid Miramonte grant in West Santa Clara Valley was his reward for able service.

"Thirty years and more have I been here," she said. "It was a splendid wilderness when we came; nevertheless, a wilderness. We have claimed it for our own, and now it smiles for us. The flag of great Spain once waved over these valleys. The tread of Spanish friars hallowed the ground; and God blessed the work of these men with hundredfold increase. Then the Mexican colors replaced those of Spain. Ah, me! But Mexico cares nothing for us; and at heart we are still Spaniards. Yes, Spaniards; never Mexicans!"

The meal over, the party went to an adjoining room. A fire flickered on a vast, old-fashioned hearth. Candles were not lighted, and the shadows danced fitfully on the walls and tapestries of the apartment.

Señora Miramonte still wished to speak of Europe.

"My husband was once ambassador at Saint Petersburg. We met there a Russian who had been in these Californias. He had been in the diplomatic service here in Monterey, and knew the country well. Knew it north

and south and east and west. 'Soon Spain loses that country—all of it; for Mexico is going,' were his words; and he was a very shrewd, far-seeing man. He also said, 'Then the English and the Americans will come to blows over the empire that in large part is no man's land. Not twenty years,' he would say, 'after Spain withdraws from North America, not twenty years will elapse before the British Lion and the American Eagle will bare the teeth and claws to each other over these great stretches of wonderful country.' "

She paused a moment.

"The British Lion has not yet shown his teeth. He is ready to do so, just the same. Do we not know of Texas, and the country north of us here—Oregon they call it? The American Eagle has not yet cried his war-scream; yet it is swelling in his throat."

"Madam, you speak of great subjects," was Jones's reply.

She nodded, the light now playing uninterruptedly over her features which were still keen and comely. "No. It is my friend, Lomilkovsky, who does the speaking; and he died sixteen years ago."

No one broke the silence for several moments.

"I may have spoken too plainly," the venerable lady went on. "Rarely has the past opened before me as to-night. Spain cannot win; and, I say, let the flag rule the Pacific Ocean that can." She arose. "Señor, you breakfast with us to-morrow. Now, please excuse me, friends. I must retire. Early hours compel me. Señora Valentino, will you kindly act as hostess for the rest of the evening in my place?"

"Certainly, señora, certainly."

The light shone on her snow-white hair as she bowed her head in final good night.

"Well, Señor Jones, the sitting room is pleasant. Shall we return?" from Señora Valentino.

"With all my heart."

The Commodore's features were keen and powerful. Heavy eyebrows stood out across his forehead. A strong chin, cleft in the middle, balanced a well-carved nose. His lips shut like the jaws of a trap. His hair, bushy and dark, glanced grayish in the light. Withal a kindly smile seemed rarely absent from his face. A martinet on the quarterdeck, off it he was the most genial of men.

"I have not inquired how your friend met his accident," from the señora.

"We set out at daybreak this morning expecting to make our destination by night. In the afternoon something frightened my friend's horse. It took the bit in its teeth, and jumped over the bank of a ravine. Luckily, there was a pond of water at the bottom. My friend was disabled. The horse escaped despite our guide's efforts to lasso it. The guide set out to get another mount. Time passed, and he did not return. I tied my horse, securely, I thought, and climbed a high hill to get sight of some habitation. I could see none. I returned to find my own horse gone. Then we set out on foot to find shelter. I knew the Camino Real was somewhere to the east of us. Our progress was necessarily slow. Darkness came. After wandering aimlessly for a while we built the fire which the

major-domo saw. Then," smiling, "the hospitality of California was offered."

"Señor Miramonte will rejoice, I know, when he learns that Señor Jones and his friend—the name—I did not hear it——"

"My friend's name is Smith."

"Ah!—Smith. Señor Miramonte will rejoice that his house could give hospitality to the Señors Jones and Smith—unusual names. No?" She looked him full in the eyes, her smile inscrutable.

"California's hospitality is proverbial the world over," was his evasive reply.

"Ah! yes. Ah! yes. The world over, you say. I too have been much about. May it not be, Señor—ah! —Jones, that we have met before? Was it, perhaps, in London three years ago, or, even in your capital, Washington, two years past?"

"Señora Valentino, let me say, once having seen you no man could forget you. It was in Washington, also in London; and, before that, in Vienna, that I had the pleasure of knowing you."

"And the Señor Smith, your companion?" smilingly.

"Madam, I cry a truce of this. I am Commodore Billings, of the American navy. The man with me is Captain Hamilton, of my flagship. For the present neither of us cares to be thus known."

The woman arched her eyebrows. "That is entirely the affair of the Señor Commodore and the Señor Capitan. Still, why so far from the flagship?"

"We were riding incognito through a peaceful and friendly land, señora."

"Rumors float about, Señor Officer."

The man looked into the fire for a moment. "Señora Valentino, I have told you who I am. I will tell you also that I am in command of the Pacific squadron of the American navy. Will you be as candid with me, and tell me why you are in this country?"

She laughed. "You haven't yet told me why you are traveling under an assumed name; neither, why you are on the mainland of California."

"Undoubtedly for diversion, señora."

"Come, Señor Commodore, it is as our hostess said, is it not so? that the Lion and the Eagle are straining to the contest over spoils vast as the territory of all Europe. Come, let us be fair with each other. You are here in the interest of the United States. Some special errand leads you on a secret journey. An accident brings you and me under the same roof; and fate, perhaps, leaves us here alone together in conversation. It may be that you and I could come to some understanding about affairs of mighty interest. Indeed, it may be, save two nations from grave misunderstanding."

His smile was as genial as ever, as he said: "The señora favors Great Britain in the dispute she alleges may some time arise. Am I not correct?"

She bowed. "You met the Señor O'Donnell a week ago, and again four days ago. Was it at your last meeting he told you of my preferences, or at the first?" She laughed, and playfully tapped the Commodore's hand with her fan.

"Madam, may I say to you that I have letters in my

possession from our State Department, in Washington, which relate not only to your presence here but which also tell something of your work as England's secret agent in Alta California."

Again the woman laughed. "Child's play, Commodore! Child's play! The man who sent this information to your State Department, in Washington, is here, and in touch with you. Certainly, he told you as much as he wrote to Washington."

The officer made no reply.

"Commodore Billings, I deal with you, and with you only. I take not account of the frontiersman, O'Donnell. The United States, though still young, is a great nation; and should be represented by men such as you."

"Señora, O'Donnell has the confidence of Mr. Tyler, President of the United States."

"Has your Mr. Tyler the confidence of the republic which made him its President?"

There was no reply.

The señora arose. The jewels in her hair flamed and glittered in the firelight. A hundred questions seemed to burn in the depths of her eyes. She extended her hand, as if in gesture. The warrior-diplomat was impelled to arise also, and to take the hand in his.

"Señor the Commodore, you go to conference with Mendoza, of Mission San José. Is it not so?"

He started to reply, but checked himself.

"Think on what you do. We of this province—Mendoza and a handful of others excepted—desire not to be ruled by your nation."

"Señora Valentino, I am but a student of conditions here."

She moved closer toward him. He still held her hand.

"You do not come with prejudged verdict?" In her earnestness she placed her disengaged hand on his shoulder.

"Assuredly not. Of course I know the general desire of my government. Further than that I do what seems wisest."

"Then consult the people of California. See Padre Osuna, that saintly Chrysostom of this Western world. Meet Colonel Barcelo, the acting-governor. Interview Pio Pico, and his brother Andreas. See the Peraltas, the Carillos. Señor Mendoza represents but few besides himself."

She moved away from him. "As to this O'Donnell—O'Donnell! He is a man with a price on his head, placed there by the English government. What wonder he intrigues against England!"

"Some political offense, of course."

"For attempted murder! He struck down his captain on the parade ground in Dublin, following an admonition."

"Zounds, madam!"

"This would-be assassin carries word to you from Señor Mendoza—why does he forget he is Colonel Mendoza?—carries word that Mendoza has wishes for the department of California which differ from the wishes of the people themselves who comprise this department. Indeed! And who is this Mendoza? Is he not of a make-up so unrestrained that once, in a

burst of temper, he even burned to the ground his magnificent home? Ask the people of California if this is not true. Bethink you, my Commodore."

"Señora, I ask you, what is in the wind?"

"Let us be seated, Señor Commodore."

She looked at him intently. "Texas is free from Mexico. Some of your States wish to accept the republic of Texas as one of themselves. The States north of the Mason and Dixon line object. They oppose extension of Negro slavery. Your President Tyler is on the fence, dangling his long legs in the air, prepared to jump to either side, as it seems expedient for him."

The Commodore covered his mouth with his hand, to conceal an involuntary smile.

"Oregon is now jointly held by the United States and England. Some of your States wish for a part of Oregon. Others make opposition; and the opposition this time comes from those south of the Mason and Dixon line. The reason? No possibility of slavery in Oregon. Your President, from his perch, dangles his long legs yet more alertly."

Billings now laughed outright.

"Señora, you are droll."

"Is what I say not true, my Commodore?"

"Oregon is ours, my lady, by occupation. Doctor Whitman and his missionaries live in that country; are Christianizing the Indians, and drawing settlers from beyond the Mississippi. Oregon is ours, I say, by right of occupation."

"A hundred years before your Whitman saw light missionaries from French Canada lived among those

same tribes. England succeeded to the rights of France. Oregon, then, is England's by this right of occupation of which you speak."

"But, the rifles of the American settlers in Oregon! They will speak, and speak strongly, my lady."

"But the rifles of the Spanish hacenderos in California, my Commodore! Can they not speak? Commodore Billings, a shot in California will echo around the world!"

She leaned toward him and placed her hand on the arm of his chair. "A few months ago I saw Doctor McLoughlin, head of the Hudson Bay Company, at Vancouver. He knows of the work of your missionary Whitman. My Commodore, twenty British ships-of-war are in the Pacific waters. I saw them, one and all, on my journey to the North. They are not far from here."

"So many, Señora Valentino?"

"That many."

"I did not think Admiral Fairbanks——"

She waited for him to continue. As he did not she went on:

"That enthusiast, Mendoza, thinks he can persuade you to seize our capital, Monterey. Suppose you do? The province will seethe in rebellion, and call to Admiral Fairbanks for aid. He will give it. That means war. Your United States is unprepared for war at sea. Mexico then goes under an English protectorate. Texas goes back to Mexico, and England will then control the Pacific Coast from the tropics to the Russian line in the far north."

Both were standing now.

"Señora Valentino, neither Mendoza, nor anyone, can lead me into an unconsidered move in this matter."

"To-night you had an appointment with Mendoza. Fate intervened. To-morrow sees not the danger removed. He will ask you to seize this province for the United States. Commodore Billings, ruin comes if you do."

"Señora, I have never seen Mendoza."

"You know of his wishes. Others do."

"But I shall judge for myself."

Again her inscrutable smile. "Commodore, I thank you. I mean—that is to say—I thank you for listening to me to-night. I pray good will come of it." Her hand was on his arm. He took it in fervent grasp.

"Señora, Europe knows you for a brilliant woman. I say you are that, and more. I am glad to have met you again." He looked at his watch. "It is late. I fear I have kept you too long. I ask your pardon."

"My Commodore, have a care, only, that you do not ask pardon of the world one day for what your decision to-morrow may bring about."

"Your words do you honor, señora. May I ask leave now to retire?"

"The leave is yours, Commodore."

After good night had been said Señora Valentino returned to her chair by the fire. Into the flames she looked for a long time.

"The Commodore talks in his silence," she finally said to herself, smiling grimly. "The pages of this drama fast turn themselves—very fast—to the issue.

'But I shall judge for myself.' Ah! Commodore, your silence is indeed golden. So, Mendoza wishes you to seize Monterey—evidently—but, 'you will judge for yourself.' Discreet Commodore! But we shall see—we shall see!"

The thick oaken log in the fireplace was ashes before the señora went to her room.

CHAPTER XXII

ALMOST——

SEÑORA VALENTINO rode slowly along the way leading from Santa Clara to Pueblo San José. Willow trees lined the edge of the road, lifting their featherly foliage in greeting to the morning sun. Yellow light filtered through and marked the interlacing plumes with myriad fairy figures in golden tints. The branches nodded and undulated in low-toned rhythm. Tempered breezes from the bay, sweet with the breath of virgin meadow, hung light-winged over this shaded alameda. Peons, men and women, worked in the vegetable gardens by the wayside, singing as they labored. Betimes they used the guttural words of their aborigine tongue, the age-old longing of savage man flowing in heavy note and shrill refrain. Again, some neophyte rested for the moment on hoe or mattock and intoned a hymn. Then knoll and hollow resounded as the children of the wilderness sang the words of their new-found faith.

The long white line marking the fort at San José had come plainly into view when the señora halted.

"My message requested the Captain to meet me here at this hour," she said to no one in particular. Her mounted Indian guard was a score of paces behind. Just then Captain Farquharson, coming at swift gallop, turned the bend just ahead.

"Good morning!" she called to him.

"Good morning!" he called back. "Well, the great question," as he drew up at her side. "Your word reached me after midnight. Our signal-fire was lighted within two hours, on the high mountains east of San José. This morning at daylight the signal-smoke told me that Admiral Fairbanks's anchors are under weigh for Monterey harbor. Now, your note told me nothing of the particulars of your interview with Billings last night. You managed to gain his attention, I'm sure."

"I did. But our English admiral? Tell me, is he of two minds, as he was the other day; or have they crystallized into one?"

"He has agreed to keep his fleet hidden until our signal-fire or smoke informs him it is the hour to enter Monterey harbor and take possession."

"Ah! that is his mind now."

"Señora, I await with great interest some news of your interview last night with the American. He must have said something of deep import that you sent word to signal at once our admiral's fleet. Fairbanks reaches Monterey easily to-morrow. What I signal him to do there, and how soon, will be greatly determined by what you learned last night from this Billings."

"Well, Captain, since nothing is to be done until to-morrow, you have time to answer me a question or two." The lady laughed, then went on: "How did you manage to get our gringo naval heroes lost at the right time yesterday?"

"Simple, very simple, indeed. They lost themselves. One hero's saddle seat was uncertain. He gripped his

horse with his calves, to make himself more secure, forgetting the sharp spurs on his heels. The indignant broncho jumped over the nearest bank, his rider just naturally following. I declare, the gallant officer actually spun head over heels twice before he landed in the water. The peon with the two gentlemen was held by our men under pretended suspicion of being a runaway, when he went in search of another horse. This left our heroes without a guide; and Valeriano, the Miramonte major-domo, did his part when the stars began to shine. Now, señora, of course Commodore Billings——"

She interrupted him. "If the gringo hero's horse had not obligingly jumped over that bank, how would you have got the Commodore to Señor Miramonte's hacienda house at the right time?"

"Depend on it, I would have found a way. Bringing them to the Miramonte's place as suspicious characters would have been the last resort. You would have identified the Commodore, in that case, and would have made all possible amends for unwarranted detention."

"Of course." The two joined their laughter.

"Mendoza's peons were scouring the woods last night for the officers. Our fellows furnished them plenty of information. It didn't lead them to Miramonte's house, you may be sure." Again the forest echoed the sound of their laughter.

"Well," from the señora, "our two worthies set out comfortably enough this morning, after early breakfast with us. Alberto, the Miramonte's peon, guides them to Señor Mendoza. Alberto," lifting her eyebrows,

"understands English. When a lad, a religious-minded gringo tallow-trader captain took him to Boston, and had him educated, hoping he would become a missionary here of the tallow-trader's faith. Instead he reverted to the ordinary peon, and an ardent Americano hater, into the bargain."

"Fortunately for us. It was simply invaluable that he was present the other day at that Billings-O'Donnell talk at Half Moon bay, and thus found out about the appointment to meet at Mendoza's last night. But," laughing a little, yet serious, "I'm anxious as to what happened last night at Miramonte's."

"Just one more question, Captain. In what frame of mind was Padre Osuna when you last saw him?"

"You have swung him to our side, señora, for the second time. But he forced from Fairbanks and me papers giving these natives extraordinary rights when the country is ours."

"The padre is where now, do you judge?"

"Somewhere near San Luis Obispo. He travels like the whirlwind. Yesterday he swept the crowd off its feet when he spoke from the church steps at Monterey. They cheered and stormed for English rule. His discourse over, he set off for the south with the impetuosity of a crusader."

"Very well, my Captain, we have done our part. It remains for Fairbanks to do his."

"Now, señora, why was it you sent the hurried messenger last night? What did Billings say that you thought such haste necessary?"

"Practically nothing."

"I beg pardon, señora. You must have misunderstood me. I——"

"I understood you perfectly."

"Well, then, señora, think of your reply."

"My reply was that Commodore Billings said practically nothing from which I thought haste necessary. It was from what he palpably refrained from saying that I made my inference."

Farquharson drew his bridle-rein. His horse curveted over the turf, under pressure of the curb-bit. He drew the animal back to the woman's side. "Señora Valentino, what does Billings intend to do?"

"To seize Monterey for the United States if——"

"If what?"

"If he can find reasonable excuse, in the attitude of the hacenderos here, for such a move."

"But can he?"

"He can, if Colonel Mendoza is minded to supply it."

"But, señora, at the Mendoza baile the entire countryside cried out for an English protectorate."

"Yes, but we made the minds of these men for them. The structure may not be the most lasting."

"But, perdition! they——"

"Admiral Fairbanks must seize Monterey as soon as he reaches there," she went on.

"He must! By heaven he must! I'll ruin him before all England if he flinches."

"Remember, Captain, Commodore Billings will fight."

"My word, señora! Fight us! Why, bless my soul! our fleet outnumbers him at least three to one. Fairbanks could sink him in an hour."

The woman leaned in her saddle toward the officer. "I shall be in Monterey all day to-morrow. So must you, Captain."

They shook hands over the manes of their horses and parted company, the Captain riding swiftly across the fields, the lady walking her mount toward San José.

The adobe walls of the fort were a dozen feet or so in height, with eaves projecting outward, the better to prevent scaling by a possible enemy. Within these walls was a row of buildings in which were the officers of the alcalde, the subprefect, the jefe-politico and other civil officers of the pueblo. Here also were the quarters of Morando's men. The Captain himself had a reception room in one corner of an edifice facing the street. A motley gathering was in this room, also clustered around the door as the Señora Valentino drew rein. Her mounted escort had drawn up on either side of her in orderly lines, each peon so tightening his bridle that the horses walked in perfect step.

Captain Morando, the comandante, pushed his way through the crowd to the lady's side. "Thrice glad am I to see you, amiga mia. Will you not alight and rest awhile?"

"Thank you, Captain."

He released her foot from the stirrup and assisted her to the ground.

"My poor place shines like the morning in answer to your presence, señora."

She smiled on him and looked about over the waiting crowd. "Why so many sad faces here, Captain?"

"These friends mourn relatives who fell in the recent contest with Yoscolo. To-day the Department, through me, considers the demands for pensions."

"Then I interrupt."

"Indeed not, my friend. This reception room meets never a guest more welcome than Señora Valentino."

"But these sad ones? You must not neglect them for my sake."

"I shall not forget you, nor neglect them. Besides, my work with the pensioners has about concluded."

The peonas had nearly all dried their tears, had gathered their restless pocos niños together and were preparing to depart, with many blessings murmured on the "very good and very handsome comandante."

The señora seated near the Captain was greatly interested in the scene. "Their praises for you, señor, are fervent, if not loud," she remarked.

Soon the man and woman were alone in the reception room. She regarded him gravely. He started from a revery and caught her look. He flushed. She laughed a little.

"Well, Captain, I have done as you requested."

"What?"

"I have seen the Señorita Mendoza and have told her for you that——" She paused.

He waited for her to continue.

"I must say I do not quite understand the girl, charming, indeed, as she is."

"How so, señora?"

"O, friend of my heart, I would spare you pain."

"Tell me everything, señora."

"O, Don Alfredo, everything? My heart fails me. How can I wound you?"

"Do not fear for me, gentle one. Let me know the truth. Please go on."

"Well—if I must. I made occasion to do your bidding by visiting the Mendoza house, ostensibly to express to the host of the great baile at Mission San José my appreciation of that event. The señor was away, but his daughter received me. This was just the opportunity I would have wished for. Nothing could have been better for our purpose, Don Alfredo."

He bowed in recognition of the fact.

"We passed bits of conversation from one to the other on chance topics. The young lady was delightful. As we sat in the cool drawing room sipping tea and nibbling dulces I thought continually of you, my friend. Small wonder, truly, that you wished to wed this beautiful and talented young woman. Small wonder, again, that the swains of the valley lay their hearts before her, as she beckons."

The soldier's face grew gloomy.

"When our time had in a measure sped I introduced the subject on which you wished me to speak with her."

"How did she receive it?"

"I am puzzled to know how to explain. It is but a step, often, from joy to sorrow; at times, discourtesy seems waiting on the threshold of courtesy. Well, enough to say that our pleasant relations underwent a change most unaccountable. The Doña Carmelita grew cold and drew within herself. Try as I might I could not bring back the former cordiality. In the

course of the conversation I said: 'Señorita, Captain Morando loves you and you only.' She replied: 'Señora Valentino, I cannot listen to you; even though you are a guest in this house I cannot.'

"We parleyed further. She was obdurate. She tried to cut me short with the words: 'I request that this conversation cease and that you do not again mention to me the name of Captain Morando.'

"Yet still did I refuse to accept her dismissal of the subject. You see, my one-time knight, I was determined to fulfill your wishes, no matter what came."

She lowered her eyes with a tender little sigh, but went on hastily. "I continued to speak of you and of your love for her. She almost flung at me: 'Captain Morando is nothing to me, nor can he ever be. I would not wish it otherwise.'

"Then I concluded: 'At least accept his word that he meant no harm by his attentions to you.' To this she gave no response.

"We were now at the hacienda gate. She summoned the peon who had my horse in charge. As I mounted she said: 'Remember, if you call again, I shall give word to my maid to tell you I am not at home.' "

The young man came to her side and took her hand in both his. "Forgive me, señora. Forgive me, my dear friend, the stupid selfishness in asking you to do such an errand. When I think of your goodness to me and of my placid acceptance of it I curse myself for a brute."

"You are harsh with yourself, Alfredo," putting her disengaged hand on his.

"No, señora, a thousand times, no. How can I ever atone for my thoughtlessness!"

The lustrous brown eyes were looking gently at him. He gazed into their beautiful depths. She leaned a trifle nearer.

He continued: "I have been a cur! You have suffered your life long. You generously gave me the confidences of your heart. I saw how empty your years have been of the things that, after all, really count in this world; yet I, selfish fool! could only whine about my own loss."

"Don't, don't, Alfredo. You must not say such words."

"Dear amiga, you are too forgetful of yourself, always thinking of the good you may do others. You have a claim on me, a strong claim, which I shall always remember; for, no matter how unwitting on my part, unhappiness came to you years ago, and that unhappiness still persists. Added to this, I have been the direct cause of your losing your friend, the Doña Carmelita. I wish I could make compensation."

The woman's eyes drooped. Her hands fell to her side.

"The past is gone—gone the way of all past things," she said, very slowly.

"But the hurt continues," he returned.

"You certainly cannot blame yourself for that."

He dropped on his knees beside her. "My dear señora, my true friend, ask what you will of me, and if I can accomplish it, it shall be yours. I would do anything to be of service to you."

She raised her eyes and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Alfredo, how could you retrieve a broken life? Why, I envy the love of the peonas for their husbands who fell by your side at La Cuesta de los Gatos. Though bereft their love lives on. Their heart is not empty, as is mine —as is mine. Ah, me!"

"Doña Silvia, the way of love should not be difficult to one of your gentle spirit. Surely, you will find it, with all the joys bordering thereon."

Her eyebrows lifted almost imperceptibly. She moved a little away.

"Forgive me," he said anxiously, noting the movement. "I have entered forbidden ground."

"No, no, dear Alfredo. For you it is not forbidden ground. There is not a recess within my heart where you might not enter."

"You are more than kind, my good friend."

"Friend! Captain," showing some impatience, "friend! Good friend!" She tried to hide the sarcasm in her tone by an unusually alluring smile. "I am but one of your many, many good friends. Is it not so?" her voice sounding hard in spite of herself. "O, well, I must be content with whatever the gods see fit to bestow."

"Señora, you are not merely one of many. You are my most loyal, my warmest, my ever-remaining, ever-to-be-cherished, never-to-be-forgotten——" He paused, overcome by his own vehemence.

"You would scale barbed walls to carry away the señorita of the window pane," leaning wearily on her arm.

"Yes, dear Silvia, I would scale those walls," he went

on, passionately. "I would scale them and bear you away," taking both her hands. Her warm breath was against his cheek. "I would—I would——" His voice choked.

"—Even sing love songs outside the window, to the accompaniment of the guitar. O, Alfredo!"

In space of time hardly more than an instant he saw the Señorita Carmelita's eyes flash behind the barred window; heard her gay banter at the house party; felt her soft hand in his as he had spoken love to her at the baile.

Very gently he moved away from the señora. Slowly he arose to his feet. The woman quickly realized the effect of her ill-chosen words. She arose also and stood leaning on the back of her chair. For a moment they looked at each other. She was the first to speak, a queer little smile stealing over her face.

"Well, Captain Morando, I have made report to you," the smile vanishing. "I must now—journey homeward."

He escorted the señora to her horse. Assisting her to mount he kissed her hand in parting salute.

She rode leisurely out of the pueblo, pleasantly exchanging greetings with acquaintances along the way. Once on the plains, however, she lashed her horse until the beast plunged and kicked in fury. She quelled him with bit and word, then rode at break-neck speed until he was winded.

The peon guard followed in wonderment.

CHAPTER XXIII

PEDRO ZELAYA BRINGS IMPORTANT NEWS

"ON with the green boughs, Anselmo. Now, you, Francisco, the turpentine in plenty. Pronto! hombre. Pronto! Hasten! Diablo!"

The wind from the Yerba Buena side blew more and more strongly, and finally stiffened to a quarter gale.

"It is useless, Señor Zelaya," said the peon Anselmo. "The breeze from the bay so fans the blaze that there is no smoke at all, but all flame."

Don Pedro Zelaya and his peons were on a pinnacle of one of the high hills which skirt the eastern side of San Francisco harbor. Away at the south somewhere was the hacienda of Mendoza. On the roof of Mendoza's hacienda house by night and by day watchers scanned the north horizon for fire or smoke signals telling that the British fleet had sailed, and announcing, in the devious ways known to such signal-makers, the direction the ships had taken, together with other apt information.

"Caramba! Caramba!" stormed little Zelaya. "Bring more green leaves. Give over using that turpentine now. Perhaps we'll get some smoke after all."

The keen air breathed through the heaping leaves with a bellowslike sound. The fierce heat exuded the oil from the fiber and the flames roared with added vigor.

"Bring water!" commanded Zelaya. "We must have signal-smoke here, or it means a wild dash on horseback to Mission San José. Bring water, I say."

"There is no water within a league, Señor Zelaya. Besides, the high wind would blow the smoke along the mountain top, not letting it form a column that would reach upward."

The excitable Zelaya ran to his horse tied to some brush near by. Taking his canteen from the saddle he poured the contents, a quart or so of water, on the blazing fire. There was a splutter, a sizzle, and the leaves burned as furiously as before.

The sun was just peeping over the eastern horizon. Zelaya looked intently, listening expectantly. When the wind lulled for a moment there came swelling over the hills the reenforced bellowings from tens of thousands of cattle throats.

"Ah! the herds are at last coming in from the San Joaquin bottoms. Well, we have other fish to fry besides thinking of that. Say! you, Anselmo, and you, Francisco, are you sure you caught all the signals right? No danger of mistake? Are you sure?"

The small black eyes of the peons glittered. "We wish we were as sure of heaven, Señor Zelaya. Our men saw the signal fire on the high mountains east of San José last night; saw the answer on Tamalpais. This morning at daybreak they saw the great white birds swim out in the direction of the south wind. Our young master, Roberto Morago, said that only cannon and heaps of cannon balls were on the decks. He saw it through his field glass from his station on the flank

of Mount Diablo. We have brought you his word, Señor Zelaya, and our telling is true. It's no use; we cannot send a smoke signal in this wind."

Zelaya was already astride his mount. "It means a couple of hours' delay," he muttered, "a couple of hours which we can in no way afford."

He rode his horse furiously. The wind sang in his ears as he swept along. His face was set and hard, his eyes narrowing to burning sparks.

"So, the English ships have sailed southward, with decks cleared for action!" he thought. "Word must be given to Mendoza and the American commodore at once." Then with an oath: "What misfortune this strong wind was blowing on this of all mornings! Well, I'll get to Mission San José with the news if my horse holds out! or," he half laughed, "if he fails, I'll lasso a bull and press him into service."

The horseman slipped down the steep grades, passed the rancho of his neighbor, Señor Peralta; rode through the foothills comprising part of the grant of Don Luis Castro, and into the confines of his own property, the Rancho Arroyo San Lorenzo. Here he reined in for a moment, and allowed the animal to lope, an easy canter much affected in early-California days.

"Now, for Arroyo Seco, Mendoza's outpost! I'll find a fresh horse there in his corrals."

He spurred his horse which dashed along the foothills toward Mission San José. The bellowing of the returning cattle became plainer and plainer. The vanguard of the herds was already dotting the higher levels above him.

"Caramba! I'm none too far away, if I wish to avoid being caught in the press."

With word and quirt and spur he urged his horse forward. Mile after mile sped past.

"You, poor fellow, are pretty well done," to his animal as it labored along. "Well, I see Mendoza's corrals ahead. I'll leave you there in good hands, and get my saddle on another racer."

Many cattle and horses in the marshes adjacent on the bay had not been rounded up in the spring when the droves had been formed for the San Joaquin. They had swum across the intervening sloughs to the salt-grass pastures where fodder was more plentiful. After the rains had come these animals had returned to the valley lands and had grown fat.

Each stallion is a general having under him his lieutenants who, with him, form a guard for the protection of the mothers and foals of the family. As it is with the horse so is it with the cattle. The cows and calves follow the mighty leaders that afford them safety.

Thus, from the valley came hundreds of horses and cattle to meet the homecomers. They had scented their fellows from afar, and flew madly to the foothills, to do them battle. The vaqueros were miles away, in the rear of the swarming, home-coming herds. In time they would make peace by clubbing the fighting leaders over nose or horn with their heavy whip-stocks.

Zelaya was within half a mile of the Mendoza corral when a drove of fifty or more horses, led by a splendid dapple-gray stallion, came thundering from a deep hollow directly in front of him. The leader disdained

battle with a single stranger and rushed by like the wind. Don Pedro turned rein and ran with the drove for safety. Little by little he lessened speed; then, as the way opened, he left the company forced on him and again turned toward the Mendoza corrals.

A hundred paces to the side a herd of cattle, led by an immense bull, was charging in the foothills. The leader saw the horseman and made for him viciously. The Spaniard waved his reata and shouted, "Hoop-la! Hoop-la!" after the manner of the vaquero. The herd paused, snorted; then, with head and tail up, looked on while their protector fought the enemy.

The bull lowered its head and rushed at him, roaring a tremendous bass defiance. The Spaniard swung his horse to one side, and the beast stumbled past him. Again and again was this repeated. Finally, the horse stepped into a hole and fell. The rider came to the ground on his feet, moved quickly aside, in time to avoid a furious rush from the tormentor. As the bull stopped in preparation for another attack Don Pedro sprang on its back.

"I have for myself a merienda," he thought, grimly, remembering the day when he had ridden the bull at the Calaveras picnic ground.

"Come, come, run to the corral, my lordly beast!"

The animal ran around and around in a circle, roaring terrifically.

"Carrajo! Carrajo! 'twill not do," called the rider. "I must make the corral. Go, now, you son of an imp! Run as I direct!"

Climbing out well on the shoulders he managed to

reach the beast's nose with his spur. First kicking it on one side of the muzzle, then on the other, he succeeded in getting it started toward the corral.

"Grande! Grande!" he shouted. "You make not badly the mount. Hoop-la! Hoop-la! Pronto! Pronto!"

The bull ran under some trees, endeavoring to free itself from the incumbrance. Zelaya drew himself up into the branches.

"It is again the merienda, as I have said. Now, farewell, toro mio, I go to the corral and stables for a mount superior even to you."

The bull hurried back to his bellowing herd, and soon together they were tearing onward to the hills, to fight the myriad homecomers.

"A thousand and one devils! A thousand and one devils!" exclaimed Zelaya a few moments later. The corrals and stables were empty. The peon cots were vacant. Evidently, Mendoza had sent all available horses and men to the San Joaquin to bring home his grazing stock.

The little man did not hesitate. Off came his embroidered jacket, his outer, as well as his inner, shirt, then his long riding boots. He tossed his sombrero, heavy with gold, to one side.

"Behold! 'twould not be so bad, if I only had my running shoes."

The morning sun fell on his muscular torso, the runner's flat abdomen and well-sinewed limbs discernible through the knee-pants and leggings.

For an instant he pulled his short mustachios savagely. "I may meet more bulls and their families, and

I have now no spurs," glancing at his discarded boots. "Well, if a bull chases me toward Mission San José I shall reach my goal all the quicker."

It was three leagues good, as the bird flies, to the Mendoza hacienda house, at the Mission. Don Pedro set off across country at a long, swinging gait which ate the miles like fire. For nearly a league he ran along cattle paths in the tall oats and drying mustard. Then he struck the main-traveled road. Here he rested for a moment.

"Diablo!" standing first on one foot, then on the other. "That dried grass has the edge of a knife!"

The roaring of cattle and the raucous threatening of a stallion sent him flying along instantly.

"A pest on it! I prefer the sharp grass edge to these infernal stones," the ragged pebbles in the road bruising and tearing his feet, while the dry grass had cut cleanly. Still he did not waver. Bright red spots showed on his cheeks; his breath came in quick gasps, but he did not slacken the wonderful pace he had set for himself.

Once a bull compelled him to climb a tree, and once he hid under a bank while a stallion led his squadron past. "I take the rest whether or no I need it," was his laconic thought at these times.

Finally he came in sight of the towers of Mendoza's house. It was yet a league away, and more. Don Pedro tightened his belt, looked at his bleeding feet, then at the mansion gleaming white in the sun. He surveyed the landscape in search of a horseman, but in vain.

He bathed his feet in a streamlet, then darted along

the rough road at a speed that might, indeed, be fitly described as only less than that of a fast-galloping horse.

* * * * * * *

"Commodore Billings, float the stars and stripes over Monterey before another sun goes out!"

In the Administrator's sitting room were gathered Billings, Hamilton, O'Donnell, and a score of land barons of the valley.

The American's mouth shut in a straight line. "You Spaniards, save a handful, are clamoring for English rule. Still, Señor Mendoza, you ask me to invest the capital of this province with my ships. To what end?"

"To afford our California opportunity to appeal from her inconsiderate self to her wiser self."

"Mendoza, I represent the United States. My office is to conserve, or advance, her interests."

"Señor Commodore, California is the key to the vast region north and east. With this province goes mastery of the Pacific from the Isthmus to the ice. No small addition to the United States of America."

"California, in her wiser thought, you intimate, would elect to become a province under my government. I so understand you, señor."

The Administrator nodded affirmatively.

"I am, then, to hold your capital pending this expected change of attitude?"

Again the affirmation from Mendoza.

"Very well, our Señor Hacendado, suppose the inevitable finds resting place on the other horn of this dilemma, and your province elects to become British?"

Several of the men were on their feet, speaking excitedly.

"Señor Billings, not one chance in ten of such an outcome," exclaimed Fulgencio Higuera. "Geographically we belong to the United States. In politics we are one with you. Give us time to think and all of us will say aye to this."

Diego Valencia and others seconded him.

"I voted in haste for English rule," said Luis Castro. "My preference is for your country, Señor Commodore."

"And I! And I!" from a dozen others.

Billings shrugged. "Your California Baja is solid for England."

"I have letters here from Señor Carillo, the Picos, and others prominent there, stating that these men will accept what is wisest for the province," replied Mendoza.

"Well said! Well said!" broke in the heavy voice of O'Donnell.

Billings looked around the room from one face to another. Finally, his eyes rested on Mendoza. "But there is a possibility if I take your capital that I may be asked to give it over to the English admiral. Is that not true? Your people, after all, may vote to become a British dependency," giving the table beside him a resounding blow with his clenched hand.

"A bare possibility—nothing more," said Mendoza, quietly.

"In which case I should have my trouble for my pains," asserted the American.

"You would, then, have aided a sovereign people to exercise their right of franchise. Surely, your government would uphold you in that. Besides, the chance is ten to one—yes, a hundred to one—that your flag will continue flying over the province," argued the Administrator.

Billings's heavy mustachios raised along his face in a peculiar smile. His bushy eyebrows were elevated. In a moment his features fell into their usual mold.

"If I do not take Monterey, what then?"

"Then comes England," replied Mendoza, his voice low and even, "and at the present—the present, mind you, I say—an apparent majority of our people would welcome her coming. If she comes, she will stay." He looked steadily at the other. "Señor the Commodore, it may be now or never for the Americans."

There was a rush of feet in the corridor, a clatter of excited native voices, angry expostulations, and then there burst into the room a figure which startled the grave assemblage nearly out of its senses. A man naked to the waist, his feet cut and bleeding, his face streaked with dust and perspiration. He was scarcely able to stand.

"Dios!" exclaimed Mendoza. "It's Señor Zelaya. What has happened?"

The perspiring, fainting man partially steadied himself. "The English fleet sailed—this morning—at daybreak—toward the south—decks cleared for action——" He collapsed and would have fallen had not Mendoza caught him.

Zelaya soon recovered. Quickly he told his story.

"By thunder! The English fleet stripped for battle! Hurrying to Monterey! I'll shoot their infernal rudders off!" cried the Commodore.

Hamilton, unsheathing his sword, bounded to the side of his superior.

Billings's blade gave answering flash.

Excited voices hushed under the swish of steel.

The officers and Mendoza strode from the room.

O'Donnell was already at his horse's side.

"On, for Half Moon Bay! You, O'Donnell, lead the way!" shouted Billings.

"Faith! Commodore, I'm in for the race, and it's bad luck catch the hindmost!" as O'Donnell swung to the saddle.

Tomaso and his peons, signaled by Mendoza, came hurrying with horses.

"I too will ride with the Commodore Americano," called Zelaya, forgetful of his fatigue.

"Not so, Pedro," from Mendoza. "A bed and a surgeon for thee."

The Administrator mounted his prized racer, Mercurio. He waved his hand. Instantly, Tomaso and his fighting peons reined their horses behind him in double file. Captain Hamilton stood with toe in stirrup, looking ruefully enough at the prospect of a jolting ride back to Half Moon Bay.

"Fall in, Captain!" called Billings.

In a moment the Captain was racing along the road, not second to many in the run.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NEXT DAY

"IT'S ingratitude, I say, ingratitude worthy of a—Catalonian," puffed Colonel Barcelo, striding up and down the veranda on the second story of his house.

"But, dear husband, Captain Morando is not a Catalonian. He is Castilian, native of Madrid, just the same as we are."

The Colonel paused in his walk and glared at his wife. "All the worse for him! All the worse for him!" he roared. "He has birth and training of a lion and the instincts of a—a——" Breath failed him.

"O, dear husband!" in expostulation.

"Dear husband! Dear husband!" mockingly. "This is no time——" Sufficient breath had not returned to him to complete his thought.

"O, Crisostimo! Crisostimo!"

"Crisostimo! Crisostimo!" again mocking her. "I've always said, Señora Barcelo, that you have no pride, and that you talk too much."

"O, my husband, you don't love me any more. How I wish I had never come to California!"

"So do I," growled the husband.

"How dare you! How dare you!" bridled the little woman. "I believe, now, those stories about your drinking absinthe and gambling in Paris."

"Clarinda, love, I mean I wish *we* had never come to California, but that *we* had remained in Europe."

"Well, that sounds different."

"As for this Morando, why, confound those Catlonian instincts in him!"

"But he isn't a Catalonian."

"I nearly shot a villainous Catalan major once for less than what Morando has done," he blustered, ignoring his wife's remark.

"What has Captain Morando done? I'm sure he is a very good man, and everyone thinks him handsome."

"Handsome!" straightening his shoulders and looking down at his ample proportions. "Handsome! Why, once at a court ball where I was present half a dozen princesses——"

"Were present also, I presume," snappingly interrupted his wife. "Well, tell me about Morando."

"Clarinda, my dear," sententiously, "I've labored for position and power, not for my own sake, but that you should receive what is worthy of you. That has been my great ambition," pompously.

"How exceedingly nice of you!" half sarcastically from the señora, not yet quite mollified after her husband's reference to the princesses.

"I had climbed to a place where high honor was almost mine. Mexico goes out of California and England comes in. I had aimed to gain for myself governorship of the province, as well as the commandership-in-chief of all the land forces. Under England such a position should satisfy anyone. It would have satisfied

—at least, for the present; that is, my love, when ou would be at my side sharing the honors."

"Where else would I be?" her wide-open eyes darken- g a little.

"Nowhere else; nowhere else, my love—not with my onsent."

"Nor mine either," firmly.

The Colonel floundered a moment. "Where was I hen interrupted? O yes. At last I had attained a lace proper and fitting for me—and for you, too, larinda. When I say 'I' I mean you also."

"Crisostimo, why didn't you say that at first?"

"First! Say it first! Well, I meant it first. Now, omes this Morando, this villainous Morando——"

"Crisostimo, he is no such thing," defended the eñora with indignation.

"A man whom I have often fed at my own table——"

"You never did but once," again interrupting. "Other than that he has never eaten a bite in this house, except the coffee and cake sister Silvia gave him early one morning when he happened to be here."

"Well, he didn't deserve even that."

Señora Valentino came on the veranda. "Why, my dear brother, what has happened? Your face is red and perspiring, and you seem excited."

"O, Silvia, sweetheart. Crisostimo has been saying mean things about your friend Captain Morando."

"And with reason," interjected Barcelo, gruffly.

"How so?" queried the sister.

"My confidence in this Morando has been shattered to pieces."

"And how?"

"Just what I've asked him," from the Colonel's wife.

"I've just come from an interview with the English consul here. Found him closeted with that Farquharson. Well, they told me the English admiral is to take possession of Monterey to-morrow," from Barcelo.

"Why should that make you say mean things about the Captain?" asked his wife.

He puffed his cheeks and rested his palms upon his hips, in characteristic pose. "This Morando has been laying plans to capture for himself the combined office of governor and commander-in-chief of this province."

"O, Crisostimo," faintly from Señora Barcelo, "this cannot be true. You must be mistaken."

"Mistaken, wife! Mistaken! Why, that Farquharson told me himself, in cold blood, that Morando is to be given the office, and the English consul seconded the fellow."

"We all thought so much of the Captain," from his wife, nearly overcome.

"You'll see I'm right about the man," a triumphant note in the Colonel's voice.

"I know you are always right, Crisostimo, love."

"Well, poor little Clarinda, you are not to be governor's wife, nor yet wife of the commander-in-chief," he commiserated.

"We've always made the Captain so welcome when he came here, and he was such an intimate friend of you, Silvia. How could he have meditated such treason against us all?"

"Treason is just the name for it. But—England

sn't here yet, and I've got something to say about her coming. I am comandante of this presidio."

"Why, of course!" his wife cheering up.

"Yes, of course! Of course," exulted the Colonel.

"Silvia," asked her sister, "haven't you something to suggest? People say you are so bright."

Señora Valentino turned away to hide her smile. "The English consul and Señor Farquharson told you that Captain Morando is to receive the honor of which you speak?" addressing Barcelo.

"Well, it was this way. You see, I forced their hand. Just pinned them down; so, yes, or no, was all they could say," with a knowing nod.

A servant entered. "A message from the porter," she announced.

"Speak!" commanded her master.

"An orderly is at the door and requests to see Colonel Barcelo."

"Show him up here."

The soldier entered, saluted his commander and bowed to the women. "I have the honor to say the look-out at the castle reports ships entering the outer harbor."

"Coming, are they? Well, I shall let them see I am a soldier and a caballero; and, perhaps," moving his head from side to side, "that I am in command of the castle here. Clarinda, where is my new uniform? I shall appear in that, as befits the occasion."

The Colonel's wife, all a-flutter, took his arm and walked with him down the veranda stairs, Señora Valentino following.

The atmosphere of Monterey was tense with feeling that morning. By some telepathy news of the expected event had spread out from the capital. Hamlet, hacienda, and Indian rancheria were alike agog.

"Benito, the horses," called Barcelo, coming to the porte-cochere.

The acting governor made an imposing figure in his full colonel's regimentals. He mounted his horse with heavy dignity. "Wife, and sister Silvia, you ride with me."

They rode along the street to the public square. Already it bore resemblance to a fiesta day. Sidewalks were lined with men talking with lightninglike rapidity between puffs of their cigaritos. Peon and ranchero joined in the talk. Windows, verandas, roofs, even, were splendid in the vari-colored dress and headgear of the señora, señorita and peona. The whole world of Monterey became akin under stress of the greatest day it had ever known.

The Colonel endeavored to push rapidly through the square on his way to the castle. He was one of very many bent on the same errand. Carretas strained and squeaked in the press; horses snorted, reared, plunged; pedestrians risked life and limb by darting hither and thither, as opening presented.

"Out of the way! Out of the way!" Barcelo shouted after a little. "Here I am, only half way to the castle. Out of the way, I say! The Governor and his party are coming."

Two carretas going in opposite directions had locked wheels. The postilions were hurling curses and threats

at each other; the occupants of the vehicles were screaming, while numerous fellow travelers were lavishly advising the best manner of breaking up the obstruction.

"Peste!" again from the Colonel. "Give way! Give way! Such drivers should be knocked senseless!"

Peons now seized the teams by the bridles; others pulled and tugged at the carretas until each was backed into freedom.

The stream of life once more toiled onward toward the castle. The Barcelos were carried on its bosom.

The old castle was built on a bluff overlooking Monterey harbor. Its black-mouthed guns had long gaped over the quiet of the land-locked waters, and its buttressed walls meant safety to padre, Indian neophyte, and Spanish hacendado.

The fort had been called "castle" by its builders when the flag of Spain waved over the Californias. Its appointments were mediæval. The moss-grown walls betokened decay; while the crumbling cement in the rock-ribbed abutments told the same story. Its ordnance was ranged to protect harbor and approaches. Moreover, it had protected them. Within the memory of the present generation two robber vessels had attempted to force entrance. The cannon thundered and one buccaneer boat laid her bones at the bottom of the bay; while the other, white flag at masthead, sued for mercy.

A long line of soldiers held the crowd at proper distance from the castle. The Colonel, with his wife and sister-in-law, made his way to the entrance, then along

wide corridor and winding stair to the upper battlement.

Silently they looked out over the unheeding water. The surf murmured beneath them. The ocean nestled lazily against the horizon. Seabirds floated aimlessly in the air; or, with piercing cry, hurtled downward for the finny creatures below the surface of the swell.

Fishing smacks, ever ready to dare the roughest weather on prospect of full nets and ready market, now, careless of both, had found sheltered nooks whence to await the great happening. Other boats swayed at anchor near the beach.

"Major Silva," asked Barcelo of his second in command, "is our lookout sure he saw the fleet? I see nothing here."

"Absolutely certain, Colonel. His glass showed them plainly from the tower nearly an hour ago."

"Very well. See that mob out there doesn't push in any nearer."

The Major saluted and departed.

"The whole countryside seems to have pulled itself up by its boots and jumped into town; but as for that much-bragged of English fleet, there is not a sign. I, for one, don't believe it's coming. Bah!" blustered Barcelo.

"Comandante, the foreign consuls are at the gate," announced an orderly.

"Show them here."

The Comandante received them all with words and manner ceremoniously polite.

Glasses searched sky and water line, but in vain.

Colonel Barcelo went from bastion to bastion calling to his side the gunners of each piece of artillery.

Chance sentences which had fallen here and there now thickened into connected conversation, as little groups were formed.

"Your words stirred up my brother-in-law this morning," Señora Valentino said in quick aside to Captain Farquharson, who had accompanied the consuls to the castle.

"It was the eleventh hour. He asked me a blunt question and I could do nothing but give him a plain answer. He cannot harm us."

"Fairbanks is not keen on this prize, Captain," moving her head thoughtfully.

Señora Barcelo came to her sister's side. "Silvia, look through this spyglass—over that ledge, then to where that thin scroll of fog dips down to the water."

Conversation ceased, and a dozen glasses scanned the spot.

A strip of white rose into sight, glanced in the sun, darkened, then gleamed like a sunflash on ice. To the left was another, then another. Suddenly, four more projected into plain view on the right.

"The fleet! The fleet!" chorused every side.

Breezes of late forenoon freshened over the harbor. Headland and sky line cleared of feathery mist.

The seven ships, every sail set, hove into full sight.

Captain Farquharson, resting his hands on a parapet, scrutinized eagerly the nearing men-of-war. His wish framed a thought which he believed Fairbanks's coming vitalized.

Thirty years ago Spain's nerveless hand fell from the Californias, leaving them to Mexico. Mexico's hold, feeble always, year by year had loosened. To-day would see the end.

His daydream grew.

The pushing, restless Saxon of Atlantic America, after overflowing the valley of the Mississippi, would not bring his civilization to the farthest West. Ford rivers, traverse deserts, fell forests as he might, at last he would meet a difficulty he could not surmount, the backfiring line of a civilization, virile as his own, wrought by the hand of his English cousin, and this day begun in the capital, Monterey. Another empire was about to come under Great Britain's sway.

"Señors!" Comandante Barcelo's voice, low and tense, broke the stillness.

Farquharson started from his reverie.

With bellying sails the fleet came scudding on, the dark hulls scarcely touching the water. Fairbanks's flagship was in the lead, her commander's pennant flinging from the foremast, the union jack streaming above. Back from the leader, in triangular spread, as wild fowl move, followed the others, three on a side.

"Señors, attention!" again from Barcelo. "Let us have understanding right here and now. You people have come here to-day to see a province pass from hand to hand, but," pointing to the cannon, "straight words from the throats of these jolly boys here shall speak a salute the aspiring English little expect. You, men of the consulate, go, tell your nations, California scorns any yoke."

"Nonsense!" cried Farquharson. "Our ships will batter this ramshackle to pieces in ten minutes."

Barcelo exploded a tremendous, "Huh!" then added, "No need keeps you here. The casemates are at your disposal."

"Perdition on your folly!" from the angry Englishman. "Why, man, I've faced death a score more times than you have fingers and toes, you insufferable ass!"

"Another word, and I'll clap you in irons!" was Barcelo's threat. Turning to the women he said, "It is time for the señoras to seek safety below."

"I shall remain here," from Señora Valentino.

"I shall stay, also," announced the Colonel's wife.

"Señoras, I insist that you go below—and at once! Orderly, take these ladies down immediately. As for you," turning to the men, "you can suit yourselves. Stay, if you will—if your noses itch for powder smoke."

Farquharson glowered at the Colonel, but did not speak. The surprised civilians hurriedly grouped themselves against a parapet.

The flagship stood in to the sheltered lea of the harbor. As a thing alive she ran. At each onward bound she raised her forefoot clear, then plunged nose-deep into the churning spray. Her bulging canvas gleamed against the distant background.

The Admiral and his officers were on the quarterdeck. Marines and man-o'-war's men swarmed aft.

"Make ready!" called Barcelo.

Each cannoneer stood by the priming of his piece, a lighted fuse spluttering in his hand.

"Fire!" shouted the Colonel, in voice so carrying that it reached the city square.

The old cannon mouths belched response.

Sheets of flame and smoke darted into the empty air. Over town and rolling land awoke a thousand echoes.

The fort shivered to its venerable foundation.

Across the harbor ricocheted the heavy shots, dotting a path straight to Fairbanks's ship. A school of flying fish these shots might have been, moistening their fins now and then, to show that water was their element. They dropped below the surface, as seeking rest, short of their destination a hundred yards.

"Elevate the muzzles of the guns!" yelled Barcelo. "Quick! the levers. Swing them in place! Bear down! Bear down, I tell you! Bring props. Now, get to work! Load again!"

Swabbers labored with might and main. Powder carriers came stumbling through the clinging smoke. Sinewy arms strained under the iron shot.

Seizing a ramrod, with his own hands the sooty and perspiring Colonel worked shoulder to shoulder with his men.

Signal flags arose, fluttered, fell, on the Admiral's vessel. Sailors swarmed through the rigging, like flies. Sails shortened, as by magic. Under lessened speed she swung until her length paralleled the water-front.

"Up with the white flag, Colonel Barcelo! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! For God's sake, give the order!" cried Farquharson. "She's ready for a broadside."

As he spoke he ran to the flagstaff. The consuls,

storming and demanding, followed him, and made as if to lower the colors.

Barcelo halted them with drawn pistol. "Stand away! you squealing rats. I'll shoot the man who touches a halyard."

The Englishman stepped back; likewise, the others.

"O, our wives and children!" some one hoarsely cried.

"Comandante, for the love of God, bethink yourself!" remonstrated Farquharson.

"Sight those guns!" persisted Barcelo in a voice of thunder. "Now's your time! The ship's showing bottom like a dying fish. Hit the line, men, between air and water! Fire!"

Hill and valley again boomed in angry refrain. Over the bay skimmed the shot, true poised for distance, but scattering a course a quarter mile from the flagship's side.

Deck and port-hole of the great vessel frowned on the upstart who dared dispute the coming of the giant.

Away from the castle grounds in confusion tumbled the crowds that had so gayly come to enjoy a holiday.

Panic-stricken, Monterey held its breath, each instant seeing the next instant terrible in red destruction, to satisfy the Briton's vengeance.

Still the flagship swung, the circle widening, her cannon sullenly silent.

Helm hard down, she put about till Monterey lay astern. Her sails unfurled. Proud in the knowledge of her unused strength she spurned castle and capital and made majestically for the open sea.

One by one the warships wheeled and followed the leader, in triangular lines, as before.

The sea-breeze lifted from the castle the thick, black smoke-cloud. The gunners, begrimed and eager, held by their pieces.

Farquharson, white with suppressed rage, paced the battlement.

The consuls were gathered in knots of twos and threes.

Barcelo, grim and aloof, stood with folded arms and watched the departing fleet until the last speck dropped from sight.

On the way home, an hour later, Señora Valentino volunteered to the Colonel: "Well, the British ships have come—and gone."

"Yes—and I am still comandante," bluster reasserting itself. Then, to his wife: "That peon valet laid out my new uniform all right, but he gave me my old sword belt. There's simply no depending on the fellow."

CHAPTER XXV

BROWN TAKES A HAND AT DIPLOMACY

"THE consummate sentimental bookworm! He hasn't gumption enough to manage a hedge school." Farquharson threw himself into a chair and crossed his legs, knocking over another chair in the process. It was in the house of the English consul.

"I haven't caught breath after the pandemonium this morning," returned the consul. "I'm glad to be back here alive."

"See here, Twickenham, you're a civilian, and have no stomach for fighting, and not to blame either; but Fairbanks is a fighting machine. It's his business to shoot and be shot at. Sentiment is out of place in a commander of a fleet. A plague on him! Barcelo flips a few birdshot out of a brace or two of pill boxes. The British nation bows. Well, you saw the farce this morning. By Jove! I'll have Fairbanks before the high court, to answer for his work—or lack of it." Farquharson was now nervously stepping up and down the room.

"I've had my signal-fires on the hills since noon, asking the Admiral to meet me. I want it to be on land, or anywhere off his ships. On neutral ground I'm free to call his conduct by the name it deserves. England has suffered humiliation to-day, and all because of him! The dolt!"

"I thought the ship would begin bombardment at once. I don't mind confessing that 'twas a dread time as far as I was concerned."

"Begin bombardment!" Farquharson paused in his walk. "Why didn't he blast the old fort into nothingness, and California would be ours. I'll wake him when I meet him."

"Hold on, Captain! If that blasting process of yours had gone on, we, personally, wouldn't possess California, or anything else, now."

"O, Twickenham! Well, you're not a fighting man. Besides, Admiral Fairbanks didn't know we were in the castle. Furthermore, there was safety enough in the subways, if we had minded to go there."

Again he threw himself into a chair, and began fuming anew. "Now, there's Señora Valentino! She left Europe, and all that this meant to the woman she is. She has come to this out-of-the-way place—worked hard! and conscientiously! And for what? By the way, the señora should be here. She sent word she's heard something important. She's five minutes overdue as it is."

"That clock is fast, Captain."

Farquharson looked at his watch. "Only two minutes fast." He was on his feet again. "What can have kept her!"

"O, sit down, Farquharson. Let's talk over this matter."

"Talk over the matter! That's just the trouble. It's talk, talk, talk!—and nothing done! Just wait till I meet Fairbanks! I'll——"

"Now, see here, Captain Farquharson. I'm only a business man, and I don't know anything about fighting, as you intimate. But, can't you and the señora bring Barcelo to some reasonable attitude in this affair? Have him and Admiral Fairbanks arrange an entente cordiale, so that Monterey will pass into our hands without a repetition of this morning's fusillade."

The consul's wife ushered in Señora Valentino.

"Friends, I have received news from Half Moon Bay," the señora announced, coming to the point at once, and waiving all greetings.

"Of Billings's fleet?"

"Yes. The sloop-of-war, the Cyane, went aground some time yesterday."

"How did the news come? Is it authentic?"

"It is, Captain. Alberto, the peon, brought me word. By day and night he hurried."

"Splendid, señora!"

"Commodore Billings has only one other vessel, and that is his flagship, the United States," added the señora.

"Billings isn't likely to try to force the harbor with a single boat. The Yankee's mishap is our opportunity."

"But the Cyane may float at highest tide which comes in a few days now."

The señora then added significantly: "The United States can care little for this territory, judging from the weakness of their Pacific fleet. We must press this on our reluctant Admiral."

"Yes, we'll have to coax him back into Monterey, as a

mother leads a bashful child into company. But—that bumptious Barcelo! What has he to say of his conduct? California voted to come under our protection, he with the others. What, under heaven's name, prompted him?"

"The real man was to the fore this morning, Captain. His blustering second self was submerged."

"Second self submerged? Well! And did the cannonading in that rickety fort settle the dregs? My word! But what does he say of it all?"

"That his honor demanded the resistance."

"Then, why in the world didn't he think of that when he voted at the baile? Not bid us to gather our basket of eggs, only to throw a bowlder into the midst."

"The Colonel's mind was on cribbage that night rather than on the province."

"And the coming of the ships took his mind from cards to fighting," elevating his eyebrows.

"Disappointed ambition did that."

"Disappointed ambition? Señora, we gave him no assurance of office under our regime."

"No, but he cherished the desire, and importuned you this morning to confirm it."

"Well, he received his answer." The Captain's back stiffened.

"Yes, Captain Farquharson, and he gave us his. The soldier of other days awoke."

"I should say he did! I wish his popguns had shaken into Fairbanks some of that same spirit."

The señora rose to go. "A message will bring me, Captain, when you get in touch with the Admiral."

"I am expecting each moment to hear from him. At least he can use his guns to fire signals."

Both Farquharson and Twickenham attended the lady to the street.

The holiday appearance was gone from the capital. Many of the residents had taken themselves and their families out of the possible-danger zone. The others remained well within the shadow of their own rooftrees.

Farquharson's horse took him to the high ground back of the city. Reaching perpendicularly from a half dozen hills were thin pillars of signal smoke. Touching the upper air drafts they bent horizonward, and drifted slowly into nothingness.

"My smoke does its work all right, but Fairbanks's guns appear to be dumb. Drat the fellow!"

His glasses pointed out to sea. For a moment, by chance, it rested on the town below.

"Well, anyway Monterey will learn that every day isn't a fiesta day." He half chuckled.

Again he directed his attention to the smoke now ascending in fresh volume as peons replenished the fires. Again he swept the ocean with his spyglass.

A small boat was landing on the beach below the castle. The crew, waist-deep in water, was sliding it in, on the crest of a breaker. One man separated from the others and walked toward the town. The spyglass covered him, though Farquharson's thoughts were elsewhere.

"Why! Why!" in a moment, "it's old Brown. What's he been doing on a native fishing-boat?"

He shut his glass together; looked once more at the

smoke columns, then cantered down the hill. He came on his former employee near the plaza.

"How do, Brown?"

"Fine, Cap'. How are you?"

"Glad to see you, Brown."

"Same here, Cap'. I'm powerful glad."

Farquharson and the Missourian gripped in cordial handshake.

"Brown, I just saw you leave that sailboat. Are you engaged in catching fish?"

Brown leaned against the Captain's horse, tangled his hand in its mane, crossed one foot over the other, and said: "Nary fishin', Cap'."

"Well, that's a deep-sea fishing-boat."

"I reckon. But I didn't fish none in that craft."

"Out for pleasure, then. Well, what have you been doing with yourself since I saw you last?"

Brown wagged his head.

"Cap', I signed up with you in Santa Fé on prospect of big game huntin' and adventure. Well, there's been no big game, but I'm meetin' adventure, at last."

"I'm much interested. I presume you were in this boat when the bombardment was going on this morning."

"Nope. Only met her a while back. Cap', you couldn't guess where I was this mornin'."

"Well," laughing, "as you would say, I reckon not."

Brown wagged his head once more, placed his back squarely against the horse, and announced impressively: "Cap'n Farquharson, this mornin' I was on the flagship of Ad*my*ral Fairbanks."

The Captain dropped the bridle-rein in his astonishment. The horse sidled away suddenly, and Brown nearly lost his equilibrium.

"Admiral Fairbanks's flagship!" incredulously. "Why, I thought you had taken service with Mendoza."

Brown recovered balance.

"Yes, Mr. Mendoza has hired me to work for him at Mission San José, and I was on Ad*my*ral Fairbanks's ship this mornin'."

"How in the name of common sense, man, can you reconcile the two things?"

"Well, Cap', let me say, there's some things I won't speak of, seein' they're political and we're on different sides."

"Never mind, Brown; tell me how you came to be with Fairbanks to-day."

"Well, Cap,' yesterday mornin' a bunch of Injuns were rowin' me out to one of our warships, for what purpose I'll not say."

"All right, Brown. It was doubtless at Half Moon Bay. But never mind, go on."

"Well, Cap', whether it was or not, we got lost in the fog. Never saw so thick a fog. Couldn't see a row-lock."

"Yes, yes."

"Well, my Injuns rowed and rowed, and palavered, and what not. Then, they began cryin' and prayin'-like, and I understood we was lost. Hours went by. Waves began splashin' into the boat later, and I knew we had got out to sea. Innards felt awkward. Small boat's a mean place for seasickness."

"Brown, I mean no offense, but will you not tell me, in a few words, how you happened into Fairbanks's flagship?"

"Sure. Fine ship she is. You ever been on board, Cap'?"

Farquharson laughed.

"You are the same old Brown, I see. Now, forge ahead."

"Sure pop, Cap'. Injuns finally gave up, dropped oars and lay down in the bottom of the boat. I didn't blame 'em; fact there was as much sense in that as doin' anything else, under the circumstances."

The Englishman leaned on the pommel and waited resignedly.

"All suddenly the wind began to blow harder. Whew! but she came a-kitin'. Seen the same thing many a time on the Mississippi River. Boat pitched like a log fallin' down hill. Boss Injun grabbed the tiller, and howled jabber-talk at the others like all-possessed. Oarsmen got their paddles goin' in no time. Didn't think such quick work was in the critters."

"Brown—I'm—listening."

"All right, Cap'. I'll go on talkin'. Well, fog began clearin'. The Injuns took heart; put the boat about and started off for somewhere. First thing I knew, we were in trouble again. The ocean pitched wors'n before, though the wind had eased up. Soon, sir, our boat lifted clear of the water and dived down like a duck. Yes, sir!"

"Yes."

"Seems to me I went along on down for ten fathoms

anyway. Awfullest commotion under there you ever heard of. All the time I was thinkin', yes, sir, thinkin', that as much as I wanted adventure I wasn't lookin' for it on the bottom of the ocean.

"Then, I began whirlin', till I didn't know anything. First I remember I was top of the waves once more, sort o' dazed like, and whippin' away from us, like a hurricane, was an all-fired big ship. She was just a-clippin' it, knots and knots per hour. You see, we'd been caught in her wash, and just naturally capsized."

"Yes, yes. It was the flagship, was it?"

"Certain, Cap', and neat work she did pickin' us up. I was floatin' on my back, tryin' to think, when a rowboat came along. A couple of sailors caught me by my midships and shirt collar. In no time I was across a thwart, head hangin' down, and the sea-water just boilin' out o' my mouth. Sooner than I could tell it every one of the Injuns was aboard and likewise bein' deprived of the water they'd swallowed.

"Well, the big boat slowed up and waited. Our rowboat was soon alongside, and we were hauled up."

"So, Fairbanks brought you to Monterey and dropped you on that fishing smack. Brown, I'm glad you've met with an adventure at last. The fleet was off the harbor when you left, was it not? The entire seven ships, I mean."

"Cap', the seven ships were out there all right. But I don't consider that capsizin' my real adventure. No, sir!"

"You met another mishap?" turning his bridle-rein,

and looking at the signal smoke. "I hope it terminated as well for you as the first. What was it?"

"Nary mishap. Last night I had an interview with the Ad*my*ral."

Farquharson's attention quickly turned back to Brown. "An interview with Fairbanks?"

"Yes. And I had another this afternoon, a bunch of officers bein' present. I consider these interviews worthy of the name of adventure."

"Man, man, what are you talking about?"

"About interviews and adventures, Cap'. You were askin' about 'em. Do you mind my telling you, friend Cap', that you seem sort o' forgetful and absent-mindedlike? Guess I'll be goin'." The American made a move to depart and held out his hand to Farquharson.

"No, no, Brown, don't go. I'll pull my wits together. I'm more than interested. Your interviews appeared so big to me that I couldn't just catch it at first. Now, please tell me all about it."

"All right, Cap'. Since you're so interested I'll begin at the beginnin'. First, I and the Injuns were taken to a real nice place. Beds were there, and everything looked fine. A feller in uniform came 'round, the ship's doctor, and ordered me to 'get out o' those clothes.' My clothes were wet and uncomfortable, anyway, so I didn't mind 'em off, and off they came. He poked and pulled me most unmerciful. 'You're not hurt,' said he, when I'd got so mad I wouldn't have stood another poke. 'I'd have told you that in the beginnin',' I informed him. Then to another uniformed feller he

called. 'Brandy for him, a full gill, and get him some dry clothes.' Well, the Injuns——"

"Brown, let's come to that interview as soon as we can. Of course I would like to hear every particular, but time is rather short just now, and I do want to hear all about your talk with the Admiral."

Farquharson's horse caught his master's impatience and pranced around the American. Brown pivoted, keeping his face turned to the Captain.

"Now, see here, Cap', if I tell you it all, it's likely to rile you up. But it's no secret. I'd be willin' to tell it to anybody; and, between man and man, I'd rather you'd hear it from me than from somebody else. On the whole, I'm glad I've a chance to tell you, myself, bein' that we've been such good friends. 'Course, Cap', I'd be sorry to lose your friendship, but politics is politics, and I talked to the Ad*my*ral to boost my own side, which same side is the United States."

"Go on, Brown. I hope you will tell it all. I know very well which side you're on, and, as you say, 'Politics is politics!'"

"All right, just as you say, Cap'. A uniformed man brought me some clothes. He was chaplain. Nice, clever young feller he was. I soon got into them clothes. I engaged him in conversation, as to his place of residence, and so forth. Then he engaged me." Brown's language assumed company dress for the moment. He straightened up, took off his hat, and continued:

"The chaplain said to me, 'You're familiar with Monterey, are you?' 'Yes,' I said. 'I was 'round there considerable when I worked for Cap'n Farquharson.'

Cap', he knew you like a book. Said I, 'The Cap'n is smart on politics, but his politics don't go in California.' 'Why not?' he asked me. 'We won't have it,' I said. 'Who?' he asked again. 'The American nation,' I said, 'represented by the American fleet, "Seenyore" Mendoza, and no end of Spanish big fellers. They're clear agen it, and so am I.'

"The chaplain perked up a good deal at this. I went on. '"Seenyore" Mendoza, my present employer, fought old Napoleon,' said I. 'The "Seenyore" came here, I reckon, to get rid of tyrants. He'll fight to the last ditch before he'll let any of 'em get in here, and I'm with him.'

"The young preacher looked some serious now. He went away after a while."

"Go on, Brown, please."

"All right, Cap'. The name of the Ad*my*ral's boat is the Vanguard, I forgot to say. Well, after supper the preacher came 'round again. 'The Ad*my*ral wants to see you,' he said."

"You went, of course; and what happened there?"

"I could see from the start the preacher was strong with the Ad*my*ral. 'Mr. Blair tells me you are familiar with Monterey,' the Ad*my*ral said. 'I'm pretty familiar,' I told him. The Ad*my*ral's room's fixed up fine, almost like Mr. Mendoza's parlor, only not so big. 'You're the Brown who was in Cap'n Farquharson's service for a time?' he asked knowin'-like. 'If you mean his employ, yes,' I said. 'I've heard the Cap'n speak of you as an honest feller,' he went on pleasant enough, but watchin' sharp's a cat at a mouse-hole. I remarked

to him, 'I and all my folks are honest, makin' it a point to be square in money matters.'

"'You've quit Cap'n Farquharson's employ?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'How was that?' said he. 'O, for reasons,' said I, and shut up like a clam. You see, Cap', he was askin' personal questions, which I don't allow no man, providin' I don't want to answer.

"In a minute he inquired casuallike, 'You're now in the employ of "Seenyore" Mendoza, is that it?' I replied very shortlike, 'I am,' and started to shut up like another clam, then I thought better of it and blurted out, 'The "Seenyore" is determined no king sets up in business 'round this part o' the world.'

"'Where does this "Seenyore" live?' asked the Ad*my*ral. 'At Mission San José,' I told him. 'Mission San José? How long?' 'Ever since he quit fightin' old Napoleon, I reckon,' I said. I tell you, that Ad*my*ral's eyes opened wide. 'Has the "Seenyore" a following in the province?' he asked.

"I was gettin' pretty mad about then. I told him about the riflemen Mr. Mendoza has drillin', and drillin', Spaniards, Injuns, and all.

"Well, the Ad*my*ral looked away and looked away. Then suddenly he asked, 'Describe Mendoza's appearance.' I pretty soon did. 'Yes, the same man,' he said.

"He was awful quiet for a minute, then he spoke out to himself like. 'Why has no one told me about Mendoza's activities here? He's a man to be taken into consideration. I knew him years ago.'

"Finally the Ad*my*ral said, 'I'll test it out. Sail into Monterey, just as we'd planned.'

"I spoke up, 'Monterey don't want you. If anybody says they do, it's politics. Mebbe you can shoot all these cannon at 'em tell they couldn't fight back any more, but just the same they don't want you.'

"The Ad*my*ral looked mighty queer. When I left he was still thinkin' and thinkin'.

"We sailed into Monterey harbor and out again, I still stayin' on the Ad*my*ral's boat, bein's I couldn't get off, the walkin' not bein' exactly what you'd call good.

"First thing I knew, I was in the Ad*my*ral's room a second time. A power of officers were there from the other ships. 'Repeat your statement of last night, if you will,' he asked of me. Well, I did. Then the Ad*my*ral spoke up, 'The man's words were verified this mornin' by the fort firin' on us.'

"The officers looked black as thunder. One big feller said, 'Reduce their defenses and invest the city at once.' the Ad*my*ral replied, 'I've no call to take Monterey, if she's unwillin', and I'll not do it.'

"Another officer spoke up, savage as the dickens. 'The honor of her Majesty's navy is assailed. Let the fleet take over the city!' 'Not while I'm commandin' the fleet,' put in the Ad*my*ral.

"They were talkin' when I left. Mebbe they're at it yet. The fishboat was waitin' for me and the Injuns. She skimmed through the waves like grease, and here I be."

"Confounded chicken-hearted cad!" the Captain exploded.

"How!" from Brown sharply.

"I refer to Fairbanks."

"Fine old gent. Even if his politics does differ from mine I'm not agen him as such."

Farquharson stared at the sea. "Well, your friend Fairbanks, the Admiral, has done what might be expected from him."

"I reckon you know him better'n I do."

"Brown, you have done devilish work." Farquharson's face turned on the other.

"Cap', if it's harm to you personal, I'm sorry. If it's to your side in politics, as I reckon it is, I'm all-fired glad."

The Captain continued looking at Brown for a minute. His frown faded. "You've had your adventure, old man, and you've hunted big game. Yes, by Jove! and bagged it too." A curious smile crept over his features.

"Well, I haven't got it with me, Cap'."

"Say, Brown, when you went out yesterday toward that warship of yours, did you see that the Cyane——"

"No, you don't, Cap'. That there's where secrets come in, secrets from you and your side."

"Boom! Boom!—Boom! Boom! Boom!—Boom! Boom!" sounded from the sea.

Farquharson listened intently.

The signal was repeated. "Boom! Boom!—Boom! Boom! Boom!—Boom! Boom!"

"Yerba—Buena—to-morrow," Farquharson muttered, anger clinching his teeth, as his horse, under a vicious jab of the spur, dashed forward and into the town, unceremoniously leaving Brown.

"Signaling, hey? Them cannons were boomers, all

right. I've been noticing that smoke, back up on the hills, all the time I was talkin' to the Cap', and I expected to see or hear somethin' answer back."

He walked leisurely through the plaza and reached the city just in time to see Farquharson and Señora Valentino ride away in hurried gallop.

"Ah, ah! Simon J. Brown, get to work yourself. Find a horse and light out for the north."

CHAPTER XXVI

BRAVING THE STORM

"A HURRICANE in midsummer in the temperate zone. A raging ocean, named Pacific. A non-combatant admiral commanding a fighting fleet. What a diabolical combination!"

"Add, the hurricane is piling water on the swelling tides at Half Moon Bay. Soon, the Cyane, willy, nilly, deserts her sand-banks," was Señora Valentino's doleful contribution.

"And the Yankee commodore flies his flag over Monterey, appending the province to Yankeedom. Blast it all! I'd give a kingdom——" He paused.

"'For a horse,' does your Shakespeare say?" smiling a little. "There is only one thing left. If the mountain does not come to Mohammed, then Mohammed must go to the mountain."

"Señora, put out in a small boat to the flagship, you mean? It would be futile, and surely end in death. Now, let us go to the top of the hill."

A bluff thickly wooded with scrub oak had sheltered them. Their sure-footed horses nimbly climbed a precipitous path zigzagging to the summit.

"See, señora. Look, if you can."

They were on Point Lobos crest, overhanging San

Francisco Bay, with Yerba Buena village straggling along the harbor line.

Grit and sand whistled through the air, biting the skin, choking the throat and stinging the eyes. With arched backs and drooping heads their mounts met the storm. A hundred invisible angry hands buffeted the man and woman thus inquisitively breasting the humor of the elements.

The wind lessened, as wearied by too great exertion. The spiteful sand-drive ceased. Dimly at first, then plainly, yellow dunes hummocked into sight. Speaking the fury of a half hemisphere of water rose the crescendo of the surf.

Through the thinning haze they peered toward the west. There was the sea. Miles away, under bare poles, save here and there a strip of canvas, struggled the English fleet, each ship face to the gale, the spyglass showed them, now rising on beam end; now sliding prow downward; then teetering and dancing.

"Señora, Fairbanks dares not enter the harbor. It is equally impossible for me to get out to him. The storm is rising again. We must return to the village."

Gusts of wind pursued them as they hastened over yielding sand and wild strawberry-plot, or broke through scrub-brush and tree-growth. Pitiless dust-clouds drove them again from the open to the protection of a bluff.

They started out once more.

"Captain," in half-stifled voice, "this is the third day Fairbanks's vessels have stood there performing antics. No?"

"Yes, señora, and the third day we have been in Yerba Buena waiting for Fairbanks to keep his tryst with us. A hundred times we have gone over this. I feel greatly to blame that I consented to bring you out into this simoon again to-day. What good?"

"But, think you, to-morrow is highest tide. If Commodore Billings's sloop-of-war floats, no hurricane keeps him from blockading Monterey. Yes, and the guns of Colonel Barcelo could not prevent him from seizing castle and city."

"Fairbanks should be shot!"

"Captain, had Barcelo been kept in ignorance as to the spoils of office his latent patriotism might still be slumbering; but your English truthfulness was too much for even a wise diplomat like yourself."

"I was a fool! an inexcusable fool! But who would have thought the Comandante capable of such vim and sudden action? Besides, señora, there was Brown. He stirred up quite a kettle of fish in his own way."

"True. But Fairbanks put in, notwithstanding Brown, and would have occupied the city, had his reception been more cordial."

"Yes, yes."

"Of course both circumstances worked hand in hand. Doubtless, neither by itself would have deterred Fairbanks. In any event, it's no use repining."

"You are very kind, señora. Curse it all anyway!" After several moments in which neither spoke, Farquharson continued: "Well, Brown; good old Brown. He's a mighty decent fellow, true to his colors, and fights as fair as the rest of us."

They halted their horses. Beneath them, a little to the right, was a group of cabins belonging to fisher folk, smoke arising from the chimneys, telling of warmth and crude comfort inside. The boats of the habitants, high drawn up, were securely fastened to their moorings.

The wind roared and hissed and fumed. The señora and the Captain seemed not to heed it. They were looking, straight-eyed, out to the lashing sea whereon lay their hopes and their fears.

"Captain, your friend Brown found his way to Fairbanks's ship. No?"

"Yes, Brown—tumbled—on board."

Their horses were side by side, yet Farquharson's voice sounded muffled through the howling wind.

"Ah! tumbled. Yes. Still, he gained the Admiral's ear. No?"

"Fate threw the game in Brown's favor, and against us."

"Fate causes the daring one to win; the laggard, to lose. Is it not so?" raising her shoulders and waving a hand, with the grace of the Latin and the art of a beautiful woman.

The spirit of the air paused again.

"Señora, if you mean, by any chance, that I should send a boat out, why, only a madman would go. Besides Comandante Pacheco would permit no boat to leave the presidio; and the alcalde would do the same for Yerba Buena village."

Time passed. The señora suddenly spurred her horse. The startled animal leaped forward. "Come,

Captain, let us go to town," she called, already several lengths ahead.

They rode persistently on till they reached a small shed far down where they stopped for rest.

"Perdition on this inactivity! If we could only do something—anything to fill in the time in this dead little hole."

"Yes, Captain," in a detached voice.

"I have a suggestion. My good hostess, Señora Ramon, showed me yesterday a chess-board most remarkable in workmanship, brought by the señor her husband from Spain years ago. They spend many evenings over the game, she tells me. Let us borrow the board and its men and while away a few hours. At least with these we can have the satisfaction of planning—and executing—our own maneuvers. I wish we had done this before, instead of indulging in useless, nerve-wracking vigils."

"Thank you, Captain, but I—I shall be otherwise engaged this afternoon."

"I understand, señora. You do, truly, need a good rest. Excuse me for my thoughtlessness. I know you are worn out. I believe, now that I think of it, I'll follow your example, go to my quarters and turn in for a time myself."

After partaking of a warm luncheon which her friend Señora Aguirre had prepared, the señora went to her room. In the home of Señor Ramon, at the other end of the village, the Captain settled himself for a siesta. Not so the señora. Tying her hair closely, she put on a long, thick cloak which she carefully buttoned, placing

the hood on her head and well down over her ears; lastly, a veil around her face. Then she wrote a short note.

Opening a window she dropped lightly to the ground, keeping under the eaves till the rear of the house was reached. As swiftly as would a boy she ran to the stable and ordered the sleepy groom to give her an untired horse. She was soon off, vying with the wind in speed, ignoring, in her eagerness, both storm and cutting sand.

She came to the cabins near which she and the Captain had been standing not two hours ago. Taking the first house at hand she unceremoniously opened the door. The surprised occupants, a man and woman, with three nearly grown sons, started from various attitudes of inertia and excitedly greeted the lady.

"Quick! Quick!" she said. "A boat at once! I must reach those ships out there before the night falls."

"Never, señora. It would mean the life of anyone attempting it."

"No, no! Come! Let us be off! Quick!" hastily opening a small chamois bag. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred dollars in gold she counted out. "It is all yours, if you will but come."

The youngest of the sons would do as she wished, if the father and brothers would join. They would not. Yet she urged. The wailing of the woman of the family offset any progress she might have made with the men.

A large diamond ring which the señora always wore, day or evening, gleamed insinuatingly into her eyes. She caught its message. Hastily removing it she held it out:

"This and the gold, as well, shall be yours. See, it is worth a fortune. Come, be quick! A boat!"

"But we shall drown! We shall drown!"

"I tell you no," and before they realized what they were doing they were out of the house, the señora pulling at the ropes which confined one of the largest of the little cluster of vessels.

The boat was soon at the edge of the water. The señora jumped in. The men, half dazed, followed. They bent to the oars, the señora's commands accompanied by the weeping vociferations of the fisher-wife and mother. The other cabins had now emptied themselves, and men, women, and children united in the hue and cry. It was too late. Despite the handicap of wind and wave the sturdy craft was well out, under the compelling influence of the señora's determination.

Time after time they were on the verge of overturning. Time after time huge billows challenged them. Again, the men wearied almost to exhaustion, would have given up the oars, to drift as they would, had not the señora, her eyes flaming, threatened them with all the terrors of an inferno; or as the mood changed, pleading with them with the earnestness of a Paul.

They passed the shadows of Point Lobos and fared out across the bar to the open sea. Here the storm king's fury was at focus, the incoming and outgoing seas forming a rip tide. The boat twisted, pitched, tossed; was flung around and around. Wave upon wave rolled over them. By some trick of fortune they were not hurled into the ocean.

The father and eldest son bent all their iron strength to the oars; while the others baled out the boat with might and main, the señora aiding energetically.

"Now, broad-backed father and mighty son, another stroke, and another!" With the incision of steel her voice pierced the roar of the tempest, in words of encouragement. "Another stroke and we're head on again. Grande, hombres! She's empty of water now, and lighter to row. Adelante!"

Slowly over surge and sea-trough they crawled.

Just as they appeared to be getting a little the best of the situation a tremendous rush of water caught the boat, whirled it about and bore it harborward at terrific rate. Before the storm it sped, back to the lea of Point Lobos hills. Here the fishermen regained control.

"Madre de Dios!" exclaimed the father. "Over in one of those coves we'll find shelter where we can wait a while, till we can get back home."

"Point Lobos arroyo is here. We can land," said one of the sons.

"Hombres, turn the boat and sail out to the ships," Señora Valentino spoke.

"No," from the father, decisively. "Neither your money nor your jewel can give life to the drowned."

"Father mine," from the youngest son, "why not go out again?"

"Silly fool! Go out and be food for fish? No."

"Ah! the youth is willing to face the dangers. A woman laughs at them. Yet the most skilled boatman of Yerba Buena is afraid! A pretty story to be told

around the net mending on the beach. A pretty story! No?"

The man grunted.

"Five hundred other gold pesos, if you reach the ships. Why not be rich, enjoy life, and leave fishing to others?"

The Mexican grunted again, "No."

"Turn about. I warn you," resolution burning her words.

"No, I shall not. Death awaits if I do."

Her hand rose suddenly. The man looked into the barrel of a pistol which the señora pointed steadily at him. "Death awaits, if you do not!"

"Huh!" growled the father, "your powder's wet and your pistol good for nothing. You can't fool me."

She fired the pistol into the air; drew a second weapon from beneath her cloak and pointed it in level aim.

"The next shot will not go wild. Turn back, I say; else I crook my finger, ever so slightly, and you die, a coward! Your name a byword among fishermen!"

The man said nothing. Pride, and desire of gain spoke urgently; but, he knew the temper of an angry sea. On the other hand—that pistol barrel glinting so unpleasantly; and the eye of the señora—darkening—threatening. What a will that white woman has! Her hand was tightening—her finger beginning to press the trigger.

"Out to sea, boys!" he cried, suddenly, gripping the oars. "Get to work with your paddles. All together! Now!"

Once more they made the bar. The wind had veered

from west to north. A tiny sail, close-reefed, was raised. The boat flew southward along the coast, just outside the whitening edge of breakers. The fleet lay to the right, but their only hope of reaching the flagship was not in direct course, but in wide sweep out to sea, then to circle back toward the west.

The afternoon wore away. The sun dipped below the water's edge. Leagues out of sight of either land or warships had they come.

The sail was reefed yet closer. Father and sons tugged on the tiller rope. The rudder, square across the course, brought the boat head to wind which was again blowing westward.

The little craft cavorted like a bucking broncho; then wheeled, and dashed homeward again. A sudden gust tore her canvas from its cordage. The men sprang to the oars, and mightily fought the sea until the boat was once more in the teeth of the gale.

They were in their element now. Many a night had these fishermen lain out on the sea when unforeseen storm made entering the harbor perilous. Crossing the bar against an ocean's fury was one thing; to toss, boat to windward, safe from treacherous rocks, for a night or longer, was quite another matter.

"Señora," spoke the father, "with our sail we could have reached your ships by time of dark. We cannot with the oars. There's nothing to do but lie here. When morning comes we'll row you to where you wish to go."

The stars crept out and kept watch over the heaving craft. The waves hurled spray against the backs of the oarsmen, of which they took no notice, except as the

father would occasionally direct one of his sons to bale out the water.

Señora Valentino, who had sat for hours through repeated drenchings, shook with the cold. She was in the stern of the boat facing the others. Through the dimness they saw her crouching, elbows on knees, her body quivering, her teeth chattering.

Their rude chivalry awoke. The father spoke to one of the sons, who searched in the locker till he found a skin which had been rubbed over with seal oil. The lady wrapped herself in it.

The storm abated, and the cold increased correspondingly. The señora drew the coat more tightly about her. After a while she slept.

The fishermen began talking in low tones.

"Five hundred pesos," from the eldest son, "besides the one hundred in hand! We can buy the store of Manuel Lopez, and sell the fish that others catch."

"Five hundred pesos," from the youngest. "Is there that much money in the world? I wonder why the señora is so anxious to get on board the ships?"

"Past finding out are the ways of white people," the father replied. "Long have I ceased to try to understand them."

"I think," the boy continued, "that she must have a lover there."

"Quien sabe? If it is a lover I'll think he'll find she possesses spirit. Santa Maria! If all women had half as much, children, I'd bid you never marry."

"She is most generous with money," in way of defense from the second son.

"Money flies into the Spaniard's pocket, and out again. They care nothing for it. But this one," nodding to the sleeping woman, "would have killed us today if she had not been given her way."

"We've been calling her 'señora.' I believe we should have said 'señorita,'" came from the eldest son.

"I think so too; and I'm sure it's her lover she is going to meet out there," returned the youngest son.

"Anyway, she's very young, and very handsome."

"Handsome is that handsome does," retorted the father.

"But she makes our fortune for us; and she took the risk in coming here the same as we," reminded the middle son.

The wind spent itself finally in a few rampant whirls. The boat commenced to rock in even motion. The boys worked industriously with the baling pails.

The father took from the locker two or three fishnets. These he bunched together and placed on the bottom of the vessel near where the lady was sitting. He touched her on the shoulder. "Awake, señora. The wind has gone down, and we'll no longer ship water. I've made you quite a good bed from these fishnets. You can lie here and sleep till morning."

"Thank you, hombre," as she snuggled down on the improvised bed.

"We usually have aguardiente, but none's left in the locker this trip. Only by chance did we have that coat you're wearing."

"I'm very comfortable. I shall be as warm as if I

were at home in my own room," she laughed. "Thank you, again, very, very much."

"These summer nights pass quickly. It is morning before we know."

Hers was the sleep of exhaustion.

The rattle of oars in rowlocks awakened her. The men were no longer merely holding to the wind, but were pulling vigorously. She felt the boat urge forward with each stroke. She raised herself a little and looked over the gunwale. There was darkness everywhere, save when the starlight flashed thinly on some wave-roof.

"A good part of the night is spent, lady," the father said. "The currents begin to run as usual, now that the storm is past. I'm beating to the windward of your ships. You may as well go back to sleep."

After two hours or so he called to her. "Which ship is it that you want, señora?"

She looked about. Morning had come.

"Ah! the reenforcements are here," to herself. "Our Admiral has now eleven men-of-war." Then to the boatman: "That vessel on the left, the large one flying two flags. Sabe?"

"Sí, señora."

The Mexicans plied their oars yet more diligently.

Miles slipped away.

"Boat, ahoy!" called the lookout on the flagship.

"Ship, ahoy!" in reply from the señora. "I'm coming on board with a message for the Admiral."

Without warning a fragment of storm-beaten sea, tearing toward the harbor, caught alike fisher-boat and man-of-war.

"Fend off, men! Fend off! Our suction'll swamp you," shouted the lookout to the fishermen.

Oars were useless against the onrush.

The leaning masts of the warship overhung the struggling fisher-boat, wheeled upward, then away. Into the maelstrom drew the little craft. Sailors under hurried orders scurried about the decks of the listing man-of-war. Ropes whisked over the sides down to the water which was overclouded by foam and spray.

"The little chap's sunk!" sounded from the man-of-war.

"No, she ain't. 'Ere's a taut rope. Belike she's fast."

Figures clinging to the boat, upturned, were bobbing about in the settling mist.

"She's fast to our line, nose aloft like a hooked fish!" from the decks.

"There's a H'english girl on board!" shouted the look out. "Didn't ye 'ear 'er yell?"

Sailors, ropes knotted under their arms, were dropped to the sea by their fellows.

"Them's Mexicans," sputtered a big salt rolling over the taffrail with his burden. "I've a Mex. kid 'ere, I fancy."

An elderly man, uniform gold-braided and gold-laced, came up.

The supposed Mexican lad threw off the enveloping folds of the oiled coat. Jauntily, hand raised as if in salute, Señora Valentino stepped forth, apparently as fresh as ever in her life, despite her dripping and clinging garments.

"Come on board, sir!"

"My God! Señora Valentino!"

"At your service, Admiral Fairbanks," with an exaggerated curtsy.

Sailors and marines backed away.

"Madam, what has happened?"

"Too little, sir. Much must happen, and at once," her eyes holding his.

"First, hot blankets and the doctor's draughts, good lady."

"I require neither. A change of clothing would be acceptable, but——" lifting her hands deprecatingly.

"Not so impossible as you might think. The cabin that was my wife's will supply your needs, I'm sure. She left her keys with me when she went ashore at the Cape. The dispatch-boat which sent me flying here at an hour's notice left her no time to get her belongings. When you have made ready we'll confer; that is, after you have seen Doctor Bartlett."

* * * * * *

"Señora Valentino," the Admiral had broken in, "Mr. Blair, our chaplain, the man of many tongues, learned from the men with you your experiences of yesterday and last night."

"So, señor?"

"The risk you took in coming to me speaks better your conviction that I should take Monterey than could any word of yours. But, why has Colonel Mendoza not been mentioned to me either by you or Captain Farquharson? Why not?"

"Señor Mendoza speaks much these days of democ-

racy and fair play. Yet, both democracy and fair play demand that the minority accepts the decision of the majority. Why should we have mentioned Mendoza? He stands almost alone. As to Governor Barcelo——"

"Do not speak to me of Governor Barcelo! Only by threats of summary court-martial did I prevent my captains from bombarding the capital the other day." The Admiral sprang excitedly from his chair.

"Wait a moment, Admiral, if you will."

He was again seated.

"Colonel Barcelo sends word to you through me that he has satisfied his honor, and that you are at liberty to occupy Monterey, for all of him. He has taken all his troopers to his hacienda eight leagues away in the country."

"When he fired on me, then, it was merely by way of shotted salute?" in sarcasm.

"Nothing more, practically."

"Señora, a world war might easily start here."

"Admiral, a world peace might begin here at your word. The United States cares nothing for this territory. Two vessels only have they—worn and old—in their Pacific squadron. They even call their flagship 'the lumber wagon,' by way of jesting. California is the balance weight of Texas and Oregon. The province calls to you. Peace calls to you. Else the future sees dispute and war over province and empire treasure-trove.

"Admiral Fairbanks, this is the hour, and you are the man. If you fail, and, later, the shadows of war darken these shores, then must you answer at the bar

of conscience and humanity. I have risked my own life, and forced the poor Mexicans with me to risk theirs, that I might plead with you."

The commander looked earnestly at the woman.

"Admiral, consider the tremendous potentialities that await your inaction."

He studied the floor in deep thought.

"Now is the supreme moment, Admiral Fairbanks."

The Admiral arose, looked out the window, walked back to his desk, put his hands in his pocket, then clasped them behind him; once more went to the window, and back again; took a speaking-tube off its hook. "How are those Mexicans getting along in the cockpit, Doctor? Good. Have they breakfasted? Each one enough for three, you say? Good."

He sat quiet a moment. Arising, he came in front of the señora, lines of firmness marking his face.

"Too many times have the shadows of war darkened our world history. Her gracious Majesty, our young Queen Victoria, ever counsels to work in the interest of peace. Never have I had wish other than this. Señora Valentino, what you say strikes home. I shall invest Monterey to-morrow."

A marine rapped at the door. He saluted and gave a message.

"The Calliope signals that Padre Osuna wishes to speak with Admiral Fairbanks."

"Ah! she must have picked up the padre at San Diego," from the señora. "The high wind has returned him north in double-quick time."

"Let us go on deck, señora. The Calliope and three

others came up coast last night and knew us by our lights."

A ship's boat was approaching bearing the Franciscan. As it swung under the bow of the flagship the friar seized a rope and, hand over hand, as adept as a sailor, he reached the side of the señora and the Admiral.

After a few words of greeting the padre, noting Señora Valentino's questioning look, announced: "I have traveled from Monterey to San Diego. The southland is crying aloud for English rule," directing his words to the Admiral.

"In the interest of peace, Padre Osuna, I shall take Monterey to-morrow," from Fairbanks.

After a few minutes in conversation the señora said: "Señora Padre, I have boat and men here," pointing to the place where the Mexicans were sitting on their inverted craft. "Will you not go with me to Yerba Buena?"

"I will, señora, and my thanks are yours."

Sailors raised the boat on davits and lowered it to the water. The fishermen joyfully turned home, the padre and the señora conversing quietly in the stern.

"That bloomin' Mexican has a lot o' money bulgin' under 'is belt," one tar remarked to another, as they watched the fish-boat making for shore.

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed a third. "You should 'a seen Dickie this mornin'. Somebody sings out, 'There's a H'english gal aboard.' 'No such thing,' says Dickie, comin' over the side and spittin' water like a sperm w'ale, 'they're h'all black Mex., an' 'e a 'oldin'

the purtiest w'ite gal I ever see h'all the time. Haw! haw!" slapping Dickie's shoulder. Then, in different tones: "Admiral's signalin' a-plenty. Wonder w'at h'it's all about."

The señora, the padre and the Mexicans made Yerba Buena safely, and found the little town in uproar over the astounding escapade of a señora who had persuaded good, sane fishermen to go with her to sure death.

Father and sons escaped from congratulating friends to the seclusion of their cot where, with the mother, they rejoiced over their good fortune. Not only were they safe after an experience over which Yerba Buena was to talk for a decade, but that most wealthy señor the ships' treasurer had given each ten gold sovereigns for himself, besides paying the sire the one hundred sovereigns promised by the señora.

Señora Valentino was indefatigable as well as intrepid. Soon, with the friar and Farquharson, she was dashing on horseback down the peninsula toward Monterey.

"So you read my note to Señora Aguirre," she remarked to Farquharson.

"I did, and learned of your purpose to go out to the fleet. Finding at the Mexican settlement that you had actually put this purpose into effect I got a boat and was just pushing off to follow you when a provost marshal placed me under arrest. Confound him! as if I didn't have a right to do as I pleased, stormy or not! And that blasted comandante held me at the presidio till your return."

"Then you also were coming to the flagship? No?"

"Señora, I never dreamed you would think of such a thing as going out there by yourself. I've never felt so small in my life. It would be a relief if I was lying at the bottom of the harbor."

"Not so, Captain. It was a mad thing, my venturing forth; but, you know, when a woman wills she will. So, no fault in you, Captain mine. Pray think no more of it. As we ride along I'll tell you more of my meeting with Fairbanks after I—tumbled on board his vessel."

They reached the high ground near the Laguna de las Mercedes, two leagues beyond Mission Dolores. A deep-voiced exclamation from Padre Osuna, accompanied by a full-arm gesture, directed their attention to the right. The ocean, as if making amends for violent temper of the past days, lay in unruffled mood before them. The eleven vessels of the fleet, spread white against sapphire arc, were sailing to the south.

Farquharson's eyes, an admiring light in them, sought the señora.

"Señora, Fairbanks is really going to Monterey!"

She inclined her head.

"You are a wonderful woman. I have said this before. I say it now with double emphasis."

The three halted and watched the fleet.

"Come, let us ride on," from the señora, impatient at delay.

"Well," remarked Farquharson, "Barcelo has spiked the castle guns, and skedaddled. The Yankee's flagship is stuck in the mud, with her consort, the Cyane. I wonder what the deuce will keep that old dunderhead, Fairbanks out of Monterey now!"

CHAPTER XXVII

BUT YET A WOMAN

FOG everywhere. Congealed fog dripped from the roofs of Monterey. It fell, drop, drop, drop, in elongated pearls, on the slippery flag walks around the houses. Mountains of fog lay over the city, and slid in huge avalanches into the valleys. The harbor and near-about sea were filled with vapor-hills and crags. Fog blanketed the streets, blurred the trees, blotted the symmetry of buildings into bewildering shapelessness, and peopled the town with weird specters.

Occasionally a candle-point showed feebly in a corner lamp. Once in a while the dimness was accentuated by a lighted space streaking a yellowish gleam into the semiopaqueness—the candle of some early-rising Montereyan shining from his window. There were few of these lights to aid the passer-by; and there were few passers-by. Not only was the hour early for the people to be about, but the city itself was almost tenantless.

It was the beginning of the fifth day since the English fleet had sailed into Monterey, and out again.

Colonel Barcelo, with his soldiers, had marched away to Alisal, the colors from the fort and from the square emblazoned at the head of his column. After him rode the most of the wealth and fashion of the capital; that is, the most of those who had not preceded him.

The Colonel declared that he had satisfied honor, and that he would now retire in face of superior force.

Calmness of weather had succeeded wind-storm; still the fort slept peacefully beneath the empty flagpole, and the city plaza caught no shadow of foreign banner floating from the lofty staff in its center.

A horseman rode into town, made his way hurriedly through the plaza and crossed to a smaller plaza. He drew in sharply when he reached a house in which a light was showing through the railing of a veranda on the second story. He turned into the porte cochere. A vague figure was heaped across the threshold of the front door.

"Ola! Ola! Benito!" called the rider.

The figure resolved itself into a man wrapped in a blanket. Turtlelike his head emerged from its folds.

"Benito is with Colonel Barcelo. I am Alberto, peon of Señor Miramonte."

"Has Señora Valentino returned to the capital? Do you know?"

"The señora returned last night, señor."

"Is she within?"

"She is not, señor."

"Where is she?"

"She's away, señor."

The man loosened rein and started down the street.

"Captain Farquharson," called the peon, in tardy recognition.

"Many pardons, but may I make free to speak? The señora brought my wife, Lupincha, and me along as servants, since she heard the Barcelo place is vacant.

Señora Miramonte lent us. May I say, Captain, my lady has taken Lupincha with her and, attended by a peon guard, is now at the castle, leaving an hour ago?"

"At the castle? An hour ago?"

"Sí, Señor Captain. Breakfast is to be served there."

"Breakfast—at the castle!" the man speaking half to himself, and as if perplexed.

Alberto arose, huddled his blanket more closely about his shoulders, and came to the rider. "Several señoras and señors will be at the meal," he said in a low voice. In yet lower tone he added: "They are there to see the arrival of the English, and the defeat of the gringos Americanos—the Bostons." Bowing obsequiously, he glided over to his place on the threshold.

"Señora Valentino and friends are now at the castle, you say?"

"Sí, señor."

Farquharson galloped back to the city plaza. He paused for a moment. The horse was restless in the chilly air. Its shod hoofs, clattering on the pavement, struck showers of sparks. He rode on a few steps, and stopped again, listening intently.

"'Tis only the boom of the surf," and started out briskly for the castle. On arriving he saw light coming through the windows, and heard the voices and laughter of men and women. Two or three peons bearing baskets appeared at the postern.

"I wish to speak with Señora Valentino. Tell her Captain Farquharson is here."

The señora soon was at the door.

"I'm here, Captain."

"Barcelo's in the sulks."

"As I expected."

"As to his giving the right hand of fellowship to Fairbanks, that is not to be thought of."

"Again, as I expected."

"When I saw him he was as savage as a caged bear."

The señora nodded her head meditatively.

"It's well the cannon are spiked."

"They have been unspiked. Some one has drilled out the priming tubes."

"You don't mean it, señora!"

"Exactly."

"My hat! It's enough to drive one mad."

"Last night, about midnight, I heard Fairbanks off Point Pinos signaling the other vessels in his fleet; so he's near at hand, and I've got together a little company to welcome him."

"To think that this of all days should see such blooming fog. If 'twould only clear up so the Admiral could get in, it would end all this fuss. But, something must be done about Barcelo. Some of these men hereabouts are talking more and more in favor of a California republic. Their nonsense has evidently got into the Colonel's system."

"And disappointed ambition might have another chance if such a republic came into being. My brother-in-law has a good deal of the bulldog in him."

"I am willing to believe almost anything of him now. But we've got to get to work; otherwise he'll be down here, likely as not, blowing off his fireworks again."

"Have you a suggestion, Captain?"

"No. I've thought till I can't think any longer. In the first place, I can't do anything with him; and it's too far for you to go out there. In the second place——"

"It will be best for me to be here when Fairbanks comes. When he once gets in we must take him by the hand and keep him here."

"We are in a deuce of a fix, between the devil and the deep sea, so to speak. On one hand, Barcelo, sulky and savage, and threatening to blow the British fleet off the map. On the other hand, Fairbanks so scrupulous he's ready to throw the gifts of the gods back into their arms, at the slightest excuse. When I left you yesterday at Miramonte's I hurried south to run down rumors. I've caught up with the rumors but haven't accomplished anything else. I have men watching Barcelo's movements. What else to do I don't know."

"Well, Captain, let's do nothing for the present—since there's nothing to be done."

"If this accursed fog would only lift."

"Our standing here won't lift it. Come in and breakfast with us."

"Thank you, but I want to go back to the hills to see if the sentinels have possibly caught sight of the fleet through some rift in the fog-banks."

"The fleet is off the harbor all right, my friend. What matter whether you see it or not? You will do better for having had refreshment."

"Not now. Perhaps I'll return later. I haven't yet inquired how you are. How is it with you?"

"I am all right, thank you. I could ride to Alisal."

"But you cannot be spared from here when the fog lifts. Talk about a California republic! Señora, you should be ruler of the Californias, including Texas and Oregon."

"Captain! Captain!" her merry laugh sounding within the old castle. "Again, my friend, breakfast. Hot coffee will go well, I am sure."

"You are very good, but I will decline for the present. Good-bye for a while. If anything comes up, I'll let you know. By the way, why not make Barcelo governor and general? Morando says he won't have the office, anyway, and it might save no end of confusion."

"Don't think it. It would only add fuel to the flame. Crisostimo's pride would be seriously touched at being made second choice. Besides, he isn't the man for the place, and the home office would justly blame us. He has been a brave and efficient fighting soldier, but never could be executive or diplomatic."

Rider and horse were soon lost to sight.

The señora returned to her friends.

Breakfast was served immediately. A table had been made ready in the old armory. Vacant musket racks and empty ammunition boxes were strange adornment for a breakfast, the room itself cobwebbed and dusty. Sperm-oil lanterns furnished needed light.

Peons served coffee and tortillas, accompanied by sea-trout browned to a turn over charcoal. This was followed with a delicious dish made of chicken and green corn boiled together, and the inevitable frijoles. Strawberries, large and luscious, which had been soaked in Mission wine, were plentifully distributed at each

plate, of which the breakfasters partook at intervals throughout the meal, eating the fruit from the stem. Fresh figs stewed in sherry completed the repast.

There was little conversation in this company made up of individuals usually vivacious and talkative. The tenseness of eager expectation held everyone quiet.

The meal was not much more than finished when Captain Farquharson entered the room unannounced. The men and women sprang up.

"Señora Valentino," the Captain called.

She stepped to his side.

"My scouts have rushed word to me that Barcelo has left Alisal and is stampeding to Monterey."

"What is that you say, Captain?" from the señora, incredulously.

"Barcelo is but a few miles from the outskirts of town, saying he is going to proclaim himself dictator of a California republic, and calling down vengeance on anyone opposing. The fat's in the fire if Fairbanks gets wind of this."

"I must ride at once and meet the Colonel."

"Would that I could meet him with my old company in the Coldstream Guards! Bull-dog or no, he'd not forget the hour. I'll go along with you, señora, but it's precious little that anyone can do with such a man."

After requesting those present to await her return, the señora mounted her horse and rode rapidly toward El Camino Real, Farquharson riding with her as far as the city limits, when she said to him:

"I will go on now by myself, Captain."

"As you wish. I'll stay here, then, till you come back."

Time dragged.

Captain Farquharson dismounted and nervously led his animal back and forth.

An hour passed, and yet another. Still the Captain was at his post. For the hundredth time he fiercely drew his watch from his pocket, scowled at its face and as fiercely thrust it back.

In sudden desperation the man sprang to horse. With two fingers on his lips he began a whistle-call, but stopped abruptly. The señora had emerged from the fog.

"Señora Valentino, long ago I sent men to see if you were safe. They reported that you and Barcelo were riding up and down an outer street talking, talking, talking. You have been in conference with him over two hours. Of course nothing could be done with him."

"Colonel Barcelo has gone home, after sending his men to the barracks. When Fairbanks comes the Colonel will turn the government over to him formally, and give him the right hand of fellowship."

"How did you manage?" he asked.

"By making appeal both to his less worthy nature and to his higher."

"How do you mean?"

"First, by arousing jealousy, convincing him that a California republic would surely make Mendoza its president. Second, in appealing to his nobler side. I said to him that a California republic would mean internecine strife—Monterey, the brain and heart of the

province, fighting the north and the south, its hands and feet. So between the two arguments the cause was won."

"You actually induced him to go home?"

"He has gone," smiling. "Sister Clarinda aided me, a wife's influence, you know."

Farquharson wrinkled his forehead knowingly.

Together they returned to the castle. The little knot of people anxiously gathered around them. To their excited questionings the señora replied: "All's well that ends well."

"Your meaning, señora?" asked one.

"That we've nothing to do now—but disperse the fog."

Señora Valentino went to an upper corner of the castle, and into a room now seldom used. It had once been a sentinel chamber, and surveyed harbor and sea. More than once had she come to this place, time permitting, to revel in its loneliness.

To-day the fog drew dark shades over the windows, enveloping the room in twilight. A slow wind was blowing, enough to move the casements. This augured well. Afternoon would, more than likely, see clear skyline.

The woman's mood was to be alone. Closing the old door on its rusty hinges she turned the grating lock, and looked around with a sigh of satisfaction.

The former governor had been an intimate of this room. Here he would steal away to read and dream. The furnishings were his, and he had not seen fit to disturb them when leaving for Mexico. On shelves

were books of poems and romances. On the floor lay rugs of tasteful pattern and coloring. A few very good pictures were on the wall, while an easy chair or two stood invitingly. On one side jutted a stone fireplace, a pile of ashes on the hearth telling its own story. All these things were strangely out of keeping with the rest of the castle.

In a cupboard the señora found wood and paper in abundance, placed there by the former governor, mindful of his comfort.

"I'm cold," she shivered. "I'll call Lupincha and have a fire. No, I'll build it myself."

The dry fuel and the paper, ignited by a flint spark, soon made flames that roared into the chimney.

"Now it is cheery and warm. I'll look over one of Governor Moncada's romances till the fleet enters. Well, here's Don Quixote. He won't do—I've fought windmills myself—it's monotonous. And here, El Cid. Not to-day—more heroics. I want a book written about life as it is, not as it ought to be."

She took up a manuscript, "Ode to Falling Rain," by the Governor himself.

"Señor Moncada, why was it not an 'Ode to a Lifting Fog'? Because it is not, into the fire you go, you wrinkled bit of paper. Ah! it burns well despite the title. My brother-in-law once spoke of the governor as a fussy old curmudgeon. It would be interesting to know what the Señora Moncada thinks of the Señor Barcelo."

A knock interrupted her musing. She kept perfectly quiet. Again, the knock, a little louder, a little more

insistent. She snuggled closer into the chair. Suddenly the thought came to her that it might be Farquharson with some message of importance. She quickly unlocked the door.

"Señora Valentino, may I come in? The peona Lupincha told me I would find you here."

"Certainly, Captain Morando, come in. My friends in the castle are variously occupying themselves till the great moment strikes. I," looking around, "chose to come off here by myself," her manner charmingly cordial.

The señora was again in her chair. The comandante sat opposite. There was silence, each seeming to find nothing to say to the other.

Under the firelight the doña appeared more beautiful than ever, her form unusually petite and girlish. To the soldier she had been a piece of exquisite workmanship, cameo-cut, a rare jewel to be admired. To-day she was this, plus woman's sweetness and gentleness. His heart gave an appreciative throb.

"Silvia," abruptly, "will you be my wife?"

She flashed her eyes at him. "Captain, it is curious, isn't it? about most people. They roll along in their groove, at about the same speed, and reach a certain point at a certain time, regularly enough. Have you ever thought of it?"

"Well, no—or, perhaps, yes."

"In the old stories the chapters end with the proposal, the puppets are disposed of, the book closed. You have, then, reached this point?"

"But, Silvia, you and I have been so frank that noth-

ing preliminary seemed left for me to say—if that is what you mean—so I asked the question as I did. I vow to you by my manhood——"

She stood before him.

"Captain Morando, it was love for an ideal man that really brought me to California."

"Señora, I did not know——" also rising.

"No. You did not know," her lips hardening ever so little. "Yes, an ideal. Him I love with my heart, my soul; every energy I have. Gladly would I live for him. Equally gladly would I die for him."

"Then, señora, there is no room in your life for me? Another fills it? Why, I thought—I believed——"

"You thought! you believed! O, Alfredo!"

"You have never cared for me. You never can care. You——"

"Do not trouble either of us with further questioning. I answer, No, I do not care for you—have never cared for you."

"Señora, even but now I dared think——"

"Dare think nothing!"

"Then, Doña Silvia, I erred, that is all. My intentions were worthy. You never intimated to me anything of this—this affection. I step out of the way of this other whom you so fully love. May you be happy, and may he endow your life with all joy. I leave you now."

"No, Alfredo, not yet," her voice shaking a little. "Do you not know who it is that has impersonated my ideal?"

"No, I do not know."

"And can you not even conjecture?" a little wistfully.

"How could I?"

"You are right. How could you?" with an enigmatic smile.

She looked at him with a penetratingly appraising gaze.

"I will enlighten you. It is you—you—Señor Captain Morando—you!"

"I?"

"Yes. I tried to cheat myself. I lied to myself about you. I kept you on a pedestal for my worshiping. You, Captain Morando, are nothing to me, but the man, the ideal man, whom I hoped was inclosed in that goodly form of yours, he it is whom I love." Her tones were low and even.

"Señora, it is to me a regret that your ideal has been so misplaced."

"It is but one more link in that chain of disillusionment—my life. I suppose I should not complain. What does it matter?" Her words betokened a resignation which her glowing eyes did not verify.

The Captain moved his chair closer to her and took her hand.

"Señora, though disillusionment has passed me by, disappointment has not. Let us make common cause, and fight the battle of life together. Wounds quiver and smart in the past of both of us. Why not let the future in years of devotion each to the other, bring consoling balm to these wounds?"

Her hand remained in his, but she did not speak.

"Señora—Silvia—let us go away from here, and, in

the quiet of home life, let time do its work in scattering into forgetfulness the ashes of old heartburnings."

"And what of my lost ideal, Alfredo?"

"Señora doña, theory is one thing, fact another; and life is fact. Why not accept things as they are?"

"Many would say you speak well. And yet—rather than sacrifice my ideal would I choose to sleep forever at the bottom of the sea."

"Señora, do you believe that ideals are ever realized in this world?"

"Perhaps not. But, to come from abstract thought to concrete application. When the señorita of the window pane looked down on the parade ground facing old Pilar Convent the place widened into fields of conquest. The flashing sword in the hand of her cadet-officer became a marshal's baton, the sword-belt, a viceroy's sash. Her eaglet would fly straight-winged into the face of the sun. Though storms above the clouds might whirl him like a dried and broken branch, and hurl him back to earth, yet ever upward would be his purpose. Don Alfredo, have you ever tried your wings? Don't speak, soldier. I will answer for you. Like the pet chick, pinions folded, have you been content with hopping fences—the eaglet-cadet a village comandante."

"I am fulfilling my duty to the best of my ability."

She drew her hand away, and looked him squarely in the face.

"Fulfilling duty! Alfredo, you exhaust my patience. I have power; I have influence, I have standing at the

court of Saint James. Under Lord Aberdeen's written promise to me, would he make high place for you in Europe, or in vast India. You yawned. My offer was unconsidered.

"A strange contempt for opportunity seems ever to have been your make-up. As in manhood, so in your youth. Alfredo, during those three years at Pilar you blew a kiss to me from the parade ground; or, was it twice? or, perhaps thrice? or, even more. A valiant conquistador-in-the-making, disregarding barrier, would have reached the topmost span of that forbidding cloister, to salute the lips of the watching maiden at closer range than fifty paces.

"But to return to later times. If Britain possesses California, a viceroyship must go to some one. You shrugged when I spoke of tossing it to you; yet, it is a catch for which many an ambitious caballero would stretch ready hands."

"I am not ambition's fool, neither am I without ambition. If I rise, my own feet shall lift me, step by step," in his voice a ring of challenge.

"In other words, you prefer to protect the flocks of rich herdsmen against marauding aborigine—if not in California, elsewhere. No?"

"Silvia, let us cease this exchange of words. We have much in common. Come with me. Be my household queen. In coming here to-day not the least in my thought was the wish to take you away from the politics of the world. Come, Silvia, come."

"And, over there—in the distance—beyond the shadows—would be my ideal calling to me, chiding me,

telling me of my unfaithfulness. No, Alfredo, I lie to myself no longer.

"The other morning, as I left your official sitting room in San José, the King's Highway to Monterey became another road to Damascus. The scales fell from my eyes, as they did from Saul of Tarsus. I cursed myself for the lie to which I had sworn in the sanctuary of my soul—the lie making you, Alfredo Morando, the personification of my ideal.

"I lashed my horse. I wished—I even prayed—that the beast might spring to the rocky depths of the cañon at my side, that I might find release in the parting of my body and its soul."

"Señora Valentino, the artist sometimes so arranges the lights and shades on his sitter that he brings in relief certain lineaments to the obscuring of others, producing, often, a fancy picture rather than a portrait. Your delineation of my character, emphasizing certain points, neglecting others, seems to be hardly fair. But, doña, I scorn the pleader's place. I admit my unworthiness. Your word, then—is final?" arising and taking up his cap, dignity vesting speech and manner.

"Yes, Alfredo, final—final. Go, continue to be a comandante-protector of sheep. Gallop across the plains to Mission San José. Improvise dawdling love-songs, twangle the guitar, and strut about by the light of the moon. The Señorita de la Mendoza may again dance El Son, to bring you to her side. No longer will I keep you from her, with the vain hope that, in the capitals of the nations, you and I, uniting our men-

talities and working hand in hand, might have no small part in the history-making of our generation. Good-by, Alfredo." She extended her hand.

"Good-by, Silvia."

He opened the door and hesitated at the threshold.

"Señora, once more, is it final?"

The color faded from her face. Her features set in emotionless expression.

"Yes, Alfredo—yes."

* * * * * *

Over the sea strong wind flowed. Bank after bank of fog, rocked under powerful propulsion, was lifted into the air, and disappeared. Finally, from Point Pinos to Santa Cruz the waters laughed and sparkled in the late-coming sun. Eleven men-of-war were disclosed in the outer harbor, their wilderness of spars clustering beneath the Union Jack.

Within the inner harbor two smaller vessels were at anchor, the springs in their cables allowing them to swing end to end in the shifting tides. On their decks grim-visaged men stood at the guns. Their masts were tipped with the Stars and Stripes.

The frigate United States and the sloop-of-war Cyane had warped off the bar of Half Moon Bay. Under cover of night, and undeterred by danger, they had slipped past the English fleet which was nodding lazily in the smooth sea, awaiting the coming of dawn

and the clearing of the fog. Into the harbor, up to the very eyes of the castle, they came.

With the sun's unveiling American marines rushed into boats, hurried ashore and took possession of the city. The Red, White and Blue snapped saucily over plaza and fort.

Signals fluttered on Admiral Fairbanks's flagship, whipping the air in persistent command. In reluctant obedience the warships, for the second time, wheeled slowly back to the ocean, the Vanguard in the rear, like a stern parent driving his half-rebellious brood before him.

In the upper room of the castle Silvia Valentino was cognizant of none of these things. In the moment of Captain Morando's departure she had thrown herself, face downward, on the floor, and lay weeping out her heart.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DAUGHTER OF THE DE LA MENDOZA

"PEPITA, Pepita, be thou watchful of those threads. Red follows yellow in the pattern, else your weaving is hit-or-miss. Santa Maria! What careless fingers! See, the blanket is streaked in color, like a pinto horse. Thy knuckles, careless one, should be made to ache, by rapping them smartly."

"Thou wilt rap no knuckles of mine, Marta. Padre Osuna forbids the matrona to strike any neophyte girl, as thou well knowest. It's hard enough to sit at a loom day after day and weave blankets, when one isn't mending them, or making baskets, or grinding maize, without being beaten, if the fingers play tricks when the thought happens elsewhere."

Marta was a matrona of the department of neophytes in the single women's quarter of the Mission San José. Her specialty was weaving blankets. The Mission sheep provided wool in plenty, and hand-made looms prepared it for use, after it had been dyed the many colors dear to the Indian taste.

"Fingers play tricks when the mind is elsewhere! Well-a-day! Why has one a mind but to direct the fingers and the feet? If Pedro Carrasca's mind ever

rests on thee, when it should be on cattle-driving, behold! his pony will throw him over its head into the dry oats."

A general laugh followed from the Indian women and girls.

It was the Mission's busy season. The harvest had been abundant. Though late in coming the rains had been plentiful, and at proper intervals, so that the yield in wheat, barley, oats, and corn was scarcely below a good average. Padre Osuna had sent a vessel laden with cereals to Lower California, where bread grains were scanty and good-priced. A schooner chartered at Yerba Buena had many thousand bushels of seed-wheat on board, ready to sail to the settlements in Oregon, when a reliable supercargo was found who knew enough English to deal with the Americanos in the North.

The great matanza of the year had just been held. A half dozen trading ships were in San Francisco Bay, buying the Mission hides and tallow. Sovereignties might change, flags come and go, but trade went on forever.

The Mission's needs for the year were supplied from the "Boston" ships, in return for the commodities of the Mission. In New England a demand had sprung up for the varicolored blankets made from California wool by the Indians. Nowhere were blankets more skillfully or more durably made than at Mission San José. Accordingly, a large order had come from an Eastern supply house; and the Mission Indian women and girls worked longer hours than usual at the wooden frames.

These had been set up out of doors near the lodgment of the unmarried women.

Pepita's eyes sparkled as the others laughed.

"Pedro Carrasca is no concern of mine."

"Well, maybe not," returned Marta, her black eyes twinkling in her lean face. "When the padre inspects the blanket under your hand, if he sees poor work he will scarcely sanction your betrothal to Pedro, one of the best lads in the valley, as well as a vaquero of vaqueros; and Pepita," patronizingly, "you can do good work when you try."

"There are other vaqueros besides Pedro Carrasca."

"Right you are, Pepita. Felix Ubaldo is a better rider than Pedro. Pedro's shoulders are not always straight in the saddle," said Florida Pardo.

"No such thing," defended Pepita. "When the broncho bucks, Felix goes up and down like the jumping-jacks the little boys get for Christmas."

"Come, come, children, work, work. Talk less," from the matrona.

Pepita stamped her foot. "Work, work all the time. Why was I not born a señorita, with people to serve me, instead of having to work every day like an ox drawing a carreta full of stones?"

"Saints in heaven!" from Marta. "A crow isn't born a songster, because crows have a use as well as singing birds. Pepita, thou art a blackamoor; still, thou may become a peona of the Señorita Mendoza. Modesta, her serving maid, marries soon Tomaso, peon captain."

"O, Marta, is the Señorita Carmelita thinking of making me one of her peonas? How I would like

that! Will you not ask the padre to recommend me to the Señor Mendoza for his household?" The girl got up and put her arm wheedlingly about the woman.

"I'll tell thee, Pepita, Modesta's my niece, and I know of what I speak when I give you word of happenings at the great hacienda house."

The matrona folded her arms. The clicking of the looms was stilled. Indian maid and wife were as ready to hear the gossip as was Marta to tell it.

"Last Saint John's day the quality of Santa Clara valley attended high mass here. As you remember, Lady Carmelita played the organ. Padre Osuna alone excels her. The Indian choir sang, and—Pepita, thou sang well enough. I will say, Señorita Mendoza was much taken with thy solo part. But do not overpride thyself. Thy voice, like thy good looks, is but a gift to thee, not of thine own making."

"Tell us the story," the girl urged.

"Well, many white people had midday meal at Señor Mendoza's. Padre Osuna did not go, though he was invited. You see, our padre and the señor speak when they meet, and seem friendly, but——"

"O, Marta, I don't want to hear about that. Tell what was said about me at the meal."

"Don't want to hear—don't want to hear," repeated the matrona. "Well, I shall say nothing at all, if I'm not to speak my own way."

"Go on, Marta," cried several, nearly as eager as Pepita.

The matrona enjoyed their impatience for a while, affecting to be very busy over her loom. At last—

"At that midday meal Señorita Carmelita said she had heard you, Pepita, sing, and liked your voice as well as Modesta's; that she would soon need a new lady's maid and liked your appearance. Then, Señorita Galindo said she once had you for lady's maid, but sent you back to the neophyte house, because you listened at keyholes and talked too much."

"I did not. I did not," asserted Pepita.

"What did you do, then?" queried Marta.

"I didn't do anything."

"But thy tongue, vixen, is often loose, as if hung in the middle, to wag at both ends. Come now, what didst thou say when thou talkedst too much?"

"I knew Señorita Galindo was in love with Don Abelardo Peralta, and that he was not with her. When she pinched my arm for pulling her hair as I combed it, I told her that Señor Peralta was in love with a lady in Monterey, Señora Valentino."

"What did the Señorita Galindo say to that?"

"She pinched my arm more, and boxed my ears till I cried; then sent me to Padre Osuna all covered with lies." Pepita spat at the remembrance.

The women turned to their looms again. Marta walked around examining their work, admonishing, encouraging or assisting.

"Draw the threads tighter, Josefa. Pull them equally, not one looser than the others. Calvia, use sense; your weave is uneven."

Passing her own loom she said: "This is a design after which many blankets were made for Constancia Alvarado, she who married Señor Mendoza. The

señor's hair, then, was as black as any of yours. Don Marcel Hernandez has ordered six of each of these patterns. I shouldn't wonder if it means his daughter is going to marry. My man went to Spain once with Señor Hernandez, to bring back horses.

"Tula, hasten, thy loom moves slowly, as if tired. Wait till noon before resting. Very good, Encarnacion; the best you've done. And thou, too, Jesusa."

As the matrona came to Pepita's side she said in low voice: "Girl, worry thou not. Soon another takes thy loom and thou goest to service with the Lady Carmelita, without doubt. The padre will make recommend of thee; but remember his words in last Sunday's sermon: 'Have a care as to what thou seest, what thou hearest, and what thou sayest.' "

"I am not the only one that talks too much."

Marta recalled something to be done inside the house and went away, telling the weavers to be industrious during her absence.

When she was out of sight Encarnacion strolled over to the end loom. "Marta has pride that Padre Majin de Catala, of Mission Santa Clara, baptized her mother. Padre Junipero Serra himself baptized my grandfather, in San Diego Mission. Padre Junipero always said that Indians who work hard and pray the Virgin every day would be high in heaven when they died. I never heard he said that of lady's maids," looking at Pepita.

Pepita was happy in anticipation, and so made no reply.

"Last year, when I was at Yerba Buena, in the family of Señor Arguello," said Jesusa, whose loom had be-

come silent the moment of Marta's departure, "a very old man at Mission Dolores said the sea did not always run in and out there, past Yerba Buena, but mountains once were where ships sail now. I asked him if white men had dug the way for the ocean, and he said white men never work." Jesusa was proud of her temporary residence in Yerba Buena, and brought it forward at every opportunity.

"Will the white men, then, who are not padres, go to heaven?" inquired Tula, who had abandoned her work.

The theology of none of them was equal to a reply for this question.

"Where do you suppose all the peon soldiers have gone? I saw many, many marching away this morning, Señor Mendoza leading them. San José de Guadalupe! but they looked handsome!" said Elasia, a girl who had seated herself on the ground, her hands lying idly in her lap.

"Oho! the peon Ildefranco alone didst thou see. We know," said some one.

"Yes, yes," joined in others.

"You have no need to talk. You were all watching them, and with your mouths wide open. I saw you," retorted Elasia.

Everyone began to laugh.

"Comes Marta! Comes Marta!" cried Encarnacion from her point of vantage.

There was a general scurrying to place. When the matrona came out the silence was too intense to be sincere. She went from loom to loom.

"Your work is short by many inches of what it should

be. If your chili con carne and meal were to be as short to-day you would go hungry, and deserve it too. I have a mind to tell the padre how shiftless you all are, and that unless I stand over you, not one of you will work."

"She's willing enough for us to stop work if she has some tale to tell us about what Modesto heard; but if we stop a minute to breathe, at any other time, it's different," whispered one to her nearest companion, when Marta's face was in another direction.

The noon Angelus commenced ringing.

The looms were at once deserted.

In the neophyte house lived over two hundred Indian girls who were taught to read Spanish, together with such housecraft as a peona should know, while the music of the church occupied no small part in the daily curriculum. In addition, the neophytes were instructed in weaving, in embroidery, drawn work, lace-making; and from among them came the seamstresses who made elaborate gowns for the ladies of the Spanish gentry.

Talking was not allowed during meals. A book, generally the life of some saint, was read aloud by a matrona, or by some girl who was capable. To-day the book had been finished early. There was not time to begin another, so the rule of silence was dispensed with during the remainder of dinner. The girls proceeded to enjoy the unwonted privilege, their zest for eating, however, in no wise diminished.

Suddenly, pandemonium burst over the place. Indian warwhoops were mingled with the crash of musket-firing. Yelling and shouting were punctuated with pistol shots. The tawny mastiffs, night guardians of the

patio, now confined in a rear yard, howled a vicious protest against this noonday interruption of their sleep.

Indian horsemen hurled themselves down the hills. Indian forms arose from the ground where they had hidden in shelter of vineyard and olive grove, and avalanched on the Mission.

Mounted renegades whirled around the buildings, cutting off avenues of escape for those within. Men on foot forced the porter's lodge in front, while others rushed through the artisans' shops in the rear.

Padre Osuna, Juan Antonio, major-domo, and nearly every able-bodied peon of the Mission were busy with the trading ships lying at the Embarcadero two leagues away, on the south arm of San Francisco Bay. The institution was defenseless before the invaders, who were under the capable command of a stocky, strongly built aborigine who sat on his horse in the road which ran alongside of the house of the girl neophytes.

"Bring up the led horses," the chief had ordered when the uproar was greatest.

The screaming of frightened women broke out in shrill notes, accompanied by the furious baying of the mastiffs straining at their chains.

A shot or two sounded in the patio.

"Some of the women have got behind the gratings and are shooting at their wooers," half laughed, half grunted the leader.

"Stanislaus," asked a man near him, "can our fellows get into this place where the girls are? At Monterey they are behind doors you couldn't smash with an ax in half a day."

"Cayetano," was the reply, "I was major-domo here for years. The task set for those of us sent inside is easy. The peonas are spunky," he continued, " but they'll be the better wives in the wild hills we go to. If the enemy comes, our tepees will not be undefended in our absence."

Indians carrying struggling neophyte peonas filled the porch of the house. They sprang to the ground below and upon the backs of the waiting mounts. Soon two hundred horses were bearing double burdens.

"Any more to come?" called Stanislaus.

"No," from a lieutenant who had been in charge of the inside squad.

"Our way of finding wives may not please the padre, but it's the only resource left us," said the chief.

"It's a quicker method than the padre's," returned the lieutenant, "and we're sure of our own pick."

"Now to the hills!" commanded the leader, adding: "When Padre Osuna trails us home he can perform a hundred double weddings at once."

The raiders spurred away eastward. Some of the girls, inert from fear, made no movement in their captors' arms, others continued screaming and struggling. Shortly their cries died away in the distance, and the desolated Mission was left to the wailing matronas and the old peons whose resistance had been too feeble to attract notice from the marauders.

As unexpectedly as had the tumult begun across the way, a clanging sounded from the topmost tower of Mendoza's hacienda house. It was an iron bar striking

with lightning rapidity the rim of a bell suspended in the tower. Three strokes a second it supplied, under nicely arranged mechanism of block and pulley.

The clamor aroused every peon on the Mendoza grant, for that call meant each task must be left without delay, and all speed made to the hacienda house, as if in matter of death and life.

Peons rushed from the Arroyo Seco, leagues to the north, leaving their herds without caretakers. Plowmen in the soft vegetable fields at the mouth of the Arroyo Alameda flung the traces upon the horses' backs, and galloped the heavy work animals toward Mission San José.

Sturgeon-catchers in the far-away Alviso marshes withheld the spear as their boat floated above the rotund quarry. "Ding, dong, ding," the hills were faintly echoing. The fishermen knew their duty, and straightway discarding implement and fish, they pushed their mustangs helter-skelter through slough and marsh to their master's home ten miles distant.

Carmelita Mendoza stood in her father's bell tower, her hand firmly pressing a lever. This lever controlled the heavy tongue striking the call to rescue. The girl had witnessed from her window the attack on the Mission; had seen the renegades ride away with the stolen neophyte girls.

Stanislaus had considered the time well, knowing that Mendoza and his men were absent, as also Padre Osuna. After the fall of Yoscolo and the severe defeat of his men, the rancheros had thought the wild Indians too thoroughly cowed to attempt further depredations;

thus all had relaxed vigilance, especially in the daytime.

The chief felt so secure that he sat on his horse openly in the street during the raid. The doña could hear him jesting about the Indian girls, and caught the words of his lieutenant. She was an excellent marksman. Her rifle, a recent importation from London, was in a rack near at hand. She sighted the weapon at the chief, saw his face aligned with the barrel, and knew that a pressure on the trigger would send a bullet through his body. Her hand refused to perform the office. She dropped the rifle to the hollow of her arm. Faint for the moment, she leaned against the window casing.

The outlaws streaming over the porch of the neophyte house to the ground, together with the cries of the peonas, aroused her. Again she trained the rifle on Stanislaus. Though not more than a hundred feet away he was too intent on the work at hand to scent possibility of peril. Carmelita's fingers drew on the trigger. The slightest pressure further and the chieftain would fall to an unhallowed death before the gate of the Mission which once had honored him.

She threw the gun from her in horror. Stanislaus himself did not hesitate at the shedding of blood; and was even now ready to inflict death if necessary to the success of his plans, yet she could not bring herself to be his executioner.

The girl flew to the bell-tower. As the summons rang she saw the retreating miscreants stretching over the brow of the hill directly back of Mission San José.

The men with the girls were ahead in compact body, the other Indians spread out to check pursuit if any should be attempted.

In the Mendoza house the disorder was second only to that prevailing at the Mission. Women were crying, praying, and calling aloud for the Señor Mendoza, while the few men servants on the grounds ran hither and thither, catching up weapons, throwing them down, only to pick them up again and continue in their purposeless meanderings.

The peons of the rancho began arriving. By twos, threes, tens and scores they came. Bows, scythes and clubs were the arms of war they brought. Their excited wives and children, straggling in after them, increased the tumult.

The watch dogs of the Mission barked with renewed vigor. The Mission Indians, thinking the hacienda house was being plundered also, wailed yet louder in their fright. Some of the peonas swayed hysterically into the street and up to the front of the hacienda gate, followed by the elderly peons who swung in circles chanting wordless rhythms. Frightened horses tore unnoticed through the yard, snorting in terror.

At last the bell was silent.

Carmelita came to the courtyard gate. The uncanny movements of the frantic men and women were dizzying, but she steadied herself.

"Hear me," she called. "Listen!"

She waited a moment, then began: "Amigos, Stanislaus and his men have come in from their fastnesses, and have taken away from the Mission many girls.

These girls are daughters of our friends, and we desire to see them married to men of this valley, the honest men who tend herds and till the soil, and who will provide food in plenty for their families. The chief will take the peonas off to the mountains of San Jacinto or San Bernardino, as I overheard. Friends mine, men of this, our beloved valley, you must skim over the mountains like hawks, overtake these ravishers, and bring back the girls to their peaceful home in the neophyte house, that our valley and Mission sleep not desolate to-night."

There was no response. The strong hearts had followed Mendoza away at sunrise. There remained but the hewers of wood and the drawers of water.

Finally one said: "These stolen muchachas are no relatives of ours. Forgive me, Lady Carmelita, if I say, it is the business of their fathers and brothers to undertake rescue."

The farm hand who thus spoke knew of Stanislaus as a human bloodhound, as well as a tried and dauntless warrior. He would as lief interfere with the lion and his bride as attempt to balk the chief.

"Will you see your peon brethren of the Mission sleep in tears this night? Do not the padres teach us that the sorrow of one must be the grief of all?"

No one answered. Motionless as well as voiceless were the men and women.

"An hour's delay, and the renegades may be beyond reach," she went on.

Still no response.

A cry sounded from the Mission patio, quivering with anguish. It came from some man's throat.

"Amigos," again from the girl, "listen to what you hear. Some father is stricken down in body by the renegades, but his soul is calling aloud in bitterness for his child. Who will rush after the renegades and hang to their flank, as the wolf stays the flight of the elk? Who will go, I ask?"

The Indians shifted from foot to foot. Some of the peonas looked inquiringly at their husbands. No one spoke.

"*I* will go," suddenly from Carmelita, her form straightening, her face paling. "Who will go with me?" she challenged. "I am only a woman, yet will I handle a rifle in such a cause as this. Who will go with me?"

A grizzled Indian stepped haltingly up to the girl. "I am only old Enrico," he said. "I used to be one of the fighting men of the señor, your father, but a bullet from Yoscolo's band smashed my hip years ago and left me fit only to hoe potatoes. Señorita doña, I will go with you and harry Stanislaus with what strength I have. I can never die in a better cause."

The señorita waited. There were no other volunteers.

Enrico, turning, faced his fellows. "I'll not say, men," he exclaimed, "but whatever ye be, go to service in the house, and let the maids there ride with the señorita doña and me to the chastising of Stanislaus. Go, for we are wasting time while the hostiles' pace marks leagues the hour. Go! Cook the feed, wash the dishes, make the beds, while the peonas do the fighting. Ye cowards! Go into the house where ye belong."

Enrico's sarcasm brought no result. He turned back to Cármelita.

The girl looked past the old peon's upturned face, over the heads of the unresponsive Indians, out into the distance, her eyes resting on the eastern hills.

"I hear no other offer. So be it. A woman and a crippled old man ride forth alone. It shall not be said that the deed of to-day passes unopposed." Her face hardened, bright spots showing in either cheek. Her mouth set in lines which bespoke the fixity of her purpose.

Enrico raised his hands with affection and reverence. "Señorita doña, these arms carried thee before thy tongue could lisp a word. I will go without thee. Thou must not——"

"Hush! hush! old friend. Zunello," to a stable boy, "two horses ready for the mounting, and two rifles. Be quick! Bring them here."

As said, so done.

"Come Enrico, I'll lend thee a shoulder to help thee to the saddleseat."

In a moment she too was on her horse. She checked its head high and reined it mountainward.

"Wait, señorita, wait! Here, doña, here! I will go. And I! So will I! So will I! I! I! I! I!" swelled in hoarse tones from the multitude.

"Take them at their word at once," whispered Enrico.

She needed no second prompting. Couriers were sent posthaste to San José pueblo, Yerba Buena and Mon-

terey, with messages acquainting the different comandantes of the raid.

The Mendoza armory was opened and muskets, powder and ball apportioned to the volunteers.

While horses were being brought the señorita, with her corps of peona nurses, hastened to the Mission grounds. They found several peons who had been severely manhandled lying insensible in the patio, or trying to crawl to their quarters. A half dozen or more matronas had been beaten with clubs while offering resistance to the summary taking-away of their charges.

The injured were given first-aid treatment, and the terrified matronas encouraged to regain self-possession.

Carmelita soon left the Mission, to lead a half-unwilling band of armed mounted men up the steep grades to the east, to follow on the heels of Stanislaus, to wrest from him, if they could, the prizes his daring had gained for himself and his renegade followers.

The broad trail of the robbers led up the mountain, skirted the Great Slide and into the pass toward the valley of Calaveras where the merienda had been in late spring. Stanislaus, little apprehensive of immediate pursuit, had allowed his fighting men to crowd into the defile and mix with those carrying the neophyte girls, leaving the rear of his march unguarded. Discipline thus relaxed the riflemen passed the time bandying words with the others.

"Ha! Bartolo," from a fighting man, "the damsel with thee would better be in the saddle, and thou in her arms. Santa Cruz! if she snatches another handful of thy mop thou wilt be as bald as a buckeye."

The "damsel" was none other than Pepita, who vigorously pulled her captor's hair and beat his face whenever opportunity offered.

"She's pretty as a yearling fawn," parried Bartolo. "Art sweet-tempered and playful, little one? No?"

The "little one" replied by so energetically pushing her foot into the pit of Bartolo's stomach that he was nearly overbalanced.

"Ha! ha!" jeered the first speaker, "pass her to me, Bartolo. Otherwise it's plain who'll pound the corn and bake the tortillas in thy wickiup."

"A devil bite thee, Naciso," growled Bartolo. "Quit, thou angel," to Pepita, "or thou wilt find that in a matter of blows I can give as well as take."

At the eastern end of the pass the sides became sheer declivities; while the roadway, a sharp incline, so narrowed that a part of Stanislaus's riflemen were forced to lead the procession, the remainder to go to the rear, as a wet sponge squeezed in the middle drips at both ends.

"Halt!" like a thunder-bolt in clear sky, came a stentorian shout from the western outlet. It was Enrico, and ranged by his side and Carmelita Mendoza's were three hundred men whose carbines were gleaming in the afternoon sun.

Less than four hours elapsed since noon, and Stanislaus had calculated that no rescuing party could be organized before the following day. He was astounded. Morando, he knew, had gone to Monterey with Señor Mendoza. His scouts had brought the word shortly before the attack at the Mission.

The pursuers quickly thinned their line and stretched across the mouth of the pass.

The chief, ever quick-witted, formulated a plan on the moment—to gain time by parleying, meanwhile surreptitiously to recall his riflemen to the front, thus, with his fighters together, hold the ground till night when he would escape under cover of dark. So:

"Under whose leadership come you?" he questioned. "Captain Morando's?"

There was no reply. He repeated:

"Who's your leader, I say? Captain Morando?" his eyes searching the ranks of the newcomers.

Silently men began filtering through the press back to Stanislaus's side, in accordance with his low-toned, hurriedly given order.

"Has that one word from you left your tongue benumbed, fool? Who heads you?" inwardly swearing at his stupidity in allowing his fighting force to become divided. "Answer me. Who heads you?"

"The Señorita Doña Carmelita Mendoza," replied Enrico, impressively.

"Thou hast ever been a joker, old man," guffawed Stanislaus. "Call to mind Salinas field where our bullet overtook thee, and bawl a joke about that."

Carmelita advanced her horse a few steps. "Stanislaus, I remember you as Padre Duran's major-domo, at Mission San José. Come forth here and meet me, and let you and me alone arrange for returning the peonas to their home. For each rifle of yours we have two to oppose, and reenforcements are hurrying to join us. Come, let us speak together."

Her words to the renegade rang through the narrow cañon with the weight of a command. Amazement held the outlaw's tongue. To be summoned to war conference with a señorita was an experience hitherto unknown.

"Speak, Stanislaus," her turn, now, to insist, "or have you become dumb? Or, are you afraid to ride out to meet a woman?"

"I must have time to consult my lieutenants," dissimulated the chief. "Stand at one side, then, with your lieutenants. Let no other among you move."

The vigor of her spirit, showing through manner and speech, caused the interfiling among Stanislaus's men to lessen, then to cease.

"Is Señor Mendoza there?" he inquired. Then, in undertone, through shut teeth. "Carajo! slip along here, you scared rabbits, or I'll burn every one of you alive!"

Again the straggling rifles began pushing back to him.

"The Señor Mendoza is not here, but his daughter is. Take no further steps, not one of you, or I will order my men to fire."

Circling her horse, she gave the word: "See to your priming! Present your pieces!" as she had seen her father do on many an occasion.

"Hold, señorita!" from Stanislaus. "'Tis very fitting that we confer, but I must have my lieutenants' agreement." Then, in somewhat lower key: "Such fat wits you lieutenants are. I can beat nothing into you except with my pistol butt. Draw nearer, you rattle-pated grass-eaters."

This reached Carmelita's ears, as he intended it should; but she did not fail to catch in it the temporizing to bring to his side those of his riflemen who had not already wormed their way back.

"Girl stealer, deliver the peonas with you to us, else you and your fellow thieves will lie here, food for vulture and coyote," challenged the señorita, true daughter of the soldier de la Mendoza.

"Have care, doña," cautioned Enrico. "The miscreant's talk means treachery."

"Stanislaus is going to shoot!" screamed Pepita in warning. "He——" The last word ended in a gurgle, a hand closing around her throat.

Suddenly, the outlaws fired from the hip, with accurate aim. The bullets cut through the air. Many of Carmelita's Indians had wheeled under their horses at Pepita's cry of warning, thus saving themselves. However, not a few of the shots, flying low, found home in flesh and bone of both man and beast. The hoarse cry of stricken horses drowned the moan of fallen men. Confusion reigned among the raw recruits from the Mendoza hacienda, for the first time facing veterans. Wounded horses threshing from side to side, or struggling backward or forward, added disorder to disorder.

A fierce exhilaration possessed the señorita as the leaden whispers of death parted before her face. The heritage of twenty generations asserted itself, bringing with it the intoxication of battle and the genius of generalship. As there was no fear in her heart, so was there, for the time being, no room for sorrow at the suffering and death about her. She knew only a ve-

hement desire to dash upon Stanislaus, beat him to the dust, scatter destruction over his men, ride triumphantly back to the foothills, and return the peonas to the arms of their matronas.

The confusion among the hacienda workmen became a panic. "Escape!" one yelled, and spurred his horse to safety. One after another burst from the ranks, to follow like frightened sheep. Volley after volley whistled after them from the outlaws' pistols and carbines. Derisive yells and laughter came from the seasoned fighters.

A figure darted past the fleeing peons. A horse was brought up across the road in front of them, and Carmelita faced the retreating mob.

"Back to the cañon's mouth!" she commanded. "I'll shoot the man who yields another step," pointing significantly to her rifle. Her eyes blazed with terrible insistence, her face chalk-white with passion.

The terrified peons paused. To their superstitious natures their young mistress was become a threatening god from another world.

"The cañon's mouth is the mouth of hell," some one found courage to say.

"It is the gate of deliverance for the girls those renegades have stolen. Back to the pass, hombres! Back to the pass! and fight till the death!" She waved her rifle over her head. "Back to the pass, hombres, and make rescue!"

She turned her horse toward the cañon. "Follow me!"

She went forward. The men obeyed. From a walk,

they urged their horses into a gallop, then into topmost speed. The dispirited rabble became a fighting battalion.

Stanislaus, in curiosity to see what had become of the column so rashly attacking him, had moved back into the wake of the retreating peons.

The hoof-thunder of horses tempestuously advancing caused him to throw his force into a hollow square, fearing that some body of capable soldiery, having tracked him, was about to make a charge on him.

For the third time within half an hour the chief's senses were held in wonder. The approaching troop was the same which a few minutes before had ignominiously fled before him. Rapidly they deployed, under Carmelita's orders, the line thus formed making the men a more difficult target, as the girl had learned in watching her father train fighting peons.

"Present rifles! Aim! Fire!" the señorita called in a single breath.

The cañon shook under the deafening detonation that resulted. Boulders, loosened by the concussion, rolled down the sides of the defile. A thousand echoes reiterated the vengeance of the valley peons.

Stanislaus's Indians, massed together, withered under the tremendous fusillade. Only those in front could use their weapons to advantage, the riflemen on sides and rear of the square being in danger of hitting their fellows, if they attempted to shoot low enough to strike among their enemy.

Carmelita fired her rifle, reloaded it and fired it again and again, till the weapon clogged with powder-smut

and became so heated that she could scarcely hold the barrel for sighting.

The undrilled peons from the rancho, steadied by her example, added coolness to their enthusiasm. Despite their friends falling everywhere around them, under Stanislaus's desperate defense, their line gradually was closing in on him, their carbines, flash upon flash, cracking in deadly purpose.

The Indian chieftain's number was decimated seriously; still, in hollow square formation, he slowly backed to the narrow end of the pass, here to wait for the protecting shadows of night.

Relays of peons, arriving at the Mendoza hacienda late, hastened after Carmelita and the others. These reenforcements brought dismay to the hard-driven savages fighting against time for their opportunity to escape with their booty.

Stanislaus, knowing the value of active offense in such an emergency, detached Cayetano and a body of selected men, to make a sortie.

Cayetano's face seamed. His teeth bared. "Knock the wenches on the head! Then every man for himself! or, we'll never leave this rat-trap alive."

"Cayetano, to the front, as I say! Lead the attack!" ordered the chief.

"Lead it yourself. Your bones will look as well whitening the ground as mine."

Stanislaus, without further word, struck to his death the insubordinate.

The dire fate Cayetano had wished to visit on the peonas was seconded by the menacing looks of not a

few of the abductors. "Yes, knock the girls on the head! Knock the girls on the head! Let's get out of here! Curse the witches anyway!" could be heard on all sides.

"They are going to kill us! to kill us!" pierced the air laden with smoke of battle and the odor of blood. "O, save us! Save us! Have pity on us! Take us home! Mother in Heaven! O, save us!"

Goaded to frenzy by these cries, Carmelita's peons flooded across the intervening space and fell on Stanislaus, who abandoned to their fate the sortie detail he had thrown forward. With such men as he could muster he sped, with the peonas, out of the cañon into the broken country edging Calaveras Valley. Here his people seemed to scatter. Hoof-tracks led aimlessly to every quarter of the compass.

To solve the riddle the hacienda peons ran over the ground and nosed it like hounds. No one could tell in which direction to go in succor of the peonas.

From his saddle old Enrico peered at the signs which to the ordinary observer indicated that Stanislaus and his people had come in compact body to this spot, then, under centrifugal impulse, had departed hither and yon.

In his observings the man moved a little away from Carmelita, then returned.

"Señorita doña, I'm proud of the boys; they're all right—that onslaught—line lasted them about as long as a box of mice would a dozen terriers—but they can't read a trail."

"Then, you be eyes for us, Enrico," pleaded Carme-

lita. "Soon the sun leaves, and search to-morrow will be useless."

Enrico dismounted, slowly crawled on knees and hands, examining the ground minutely. He descended into a swiftly running stream, and studied the rocky bed through the clear water. Finally, he crept up the other side and limped away into the forest.

It seemed an age before he came back. Long shadows, forerunners of approaching night, were measuring the hills beyond. At last he was in sight, exultation lighting his face and hastening his uncertain steps.

"Señorita doña," he exclaimed, "Stanislaus is near here, on foot, and consequently at our mercy."

"How so, Enrico?" quickly from Carmelita.

"His horses left that stream riderless, as their plunging gait shows; though they went into it under bridle, as is plain from the even measure of their step. The foot impression of men's hard-leather soles lies in that creek-bed. Stanislaus and many with him wear Mission shoes of tanned cattle-skin. Furthermore," holding up a knot of ribbon, "this adornment was caught on a low-sweeping madrona branch, and these," showing several wet deer-skin moccasins inlaid with glass beads, "I plucked from crevices where the bottom of the stream is rocky. The scoundrelly renegades cannot be far away. Let us rush down on them, having caution, though, for ambuscade."

"They are bound for the cave two miles farther down the cañon, and they sought to deceive us into following riderless horses. We must cut them off before they reach the shelter," cried Carmelita.

She led the way at break-neck speed through chaparral, over gullies, up rocky heights that would have taxed the climbing abilities of a goat, down a long, thickly-shrubbed glade, to a ragged opening under a cliff. It was the exit through which, the night of the storm, Farquharson and Brown, with Yoscolo and Stanislaus, had passed from the cave which gave refuge to Carmelita and her dueña.

"Within and quickly!" called the girl, driving straight through the natural door. The peons thronged after her.

Light made its way into the many-chambered cavern through the innumerable rifts in the rocky mountain side. Carmelita led the way to the lower entrance where the carreta had come to grief. Here they waited, grim figures in the twilight silence.

"Some are coming," Enrico whispered after a moment.

They saw many forms approaching. The Indians, carrying the girls in their arms, stalked in single file, each stepping with precision in the footprints of his precedessor, to give the impression that but one man had passed that way. The semidarkness of the cave prevented their seeing anyone inside.

"Drop your rifles! Up with your hands!" Carmelita's voice gathered volume from the great spaces behind.

Stanislaus and his men were petrified.

"Drop your rifles! Up with your hands!" repeated the girl.

"Stanislaus, show yourself to be a joker. Make a jest!" mocked old Enrico.

The renegades dropped the peonas; the most of them threw away their weapons; all fled precipitately. Thus ended the memorable raid of Stanislaus, the Indian renegade, unaccountably put to rout by a delicately reared señorita.

Carmelita and the peons quickly gathered around the neophytes. Despite the severe experience of the day not one of the girls had received injury. Amid tears and laughter they loudly expressed their gratitude to their deliverers. Their vociferations were silenced by the sound of musketry discharge, in the direction toward which Stanislaus and his men had gone. Many of the peons, mad with thirst of slaughter, tore thitherward.

Soon musketry rattled again, this time much nearer the cave. The girl, leaving Enrico and a guard in charge of the peonas, rode after the men. She climbed a steep hill. Looking over a crag into the valley below, she saw that which clutched her heart.

Captain Morando lay wounded there. Stanislaus, knife in hand, was leaping down a narrow path toward him. The soldier's pistol was lying several feet away. He attempted to reach it, but ineffectually.

The Indian growled wolf-like as he neared his enemy.

"Stop!" shrieked Carmelita, springing from her horse and madly bounding down the path.

"You villain!" she flung at Stanislaus, as she faced him.

Except for the knife he was unarmed. He saw that her hands were empty. She had left her rifle on the saddle. He jumped toward her.

"Up the path, for God's sake, Carmelita!" weakly cried the stricken Captain.

"Never! I'll die first!"

The knife was cleaving the air. The girl saw only Don Alfredo.

"Pause! renegade," a deep voice sounded back of them.

Padre Osuna had vaulted from an overhanging shelf. Catching Stanislaus's wrists he wrenched the knife from his hand. Raising the desperado from the earth he hurled him with volcanic power against a tree-trunk. The creature fell senseless. Examination showed him to be stunned only.

The friar took Morando's head in his arms.

"Where the hurt, my brother?"

"My shoulder," his eyes closing in oblivion.

"O, Padre, is Alfredo much injured?" her low words trembling with emotion.

"I cannot yet tell, doña," sympathetic concern for the prostrate man showing in his face and voice as he half whispered the reply.

"The wound is deep—and ugly—on the left side, too —I don't like its looks." He seemed to be speaking to himself, as his taper fingers deftly and gently searched the course of the bullet.

Carmelita scarcely breathed.

"Get some water from that spring, doña, quick. His pulse is stopping. Bring it in his cap; there's nothing else."

The girl's feet scarcely touched the ground in performing the task.

The friar dashed the water in Morando's face. His pulse showed no quickening. Carmelita hastened for another supply of water. This was as ineffective as the first. A third capful brought a slight return of animation.

"He's a little better now."

"O, padre."

Morando looked slowly up at them.

"Better now, brother? Good," as Morando slightly nodded. "We'll have you around soon. Lie very quietly and rest."

At sight of the pallid face lying against the padre's arm, Carmelita turned and walked away, to conceal the sobbing that would not down.

"But the bullet has found no vital part. Here it is, lodged in the muscles under the arm," the friar soon announced cheeringly.

Immediately Carmelita returned, her face speaking joy, her lips silent.

"With good care our caballero will recover. Thank God!"

"Thank God!" repeated the girl, her throat hardly vocalizing the words.

"And now, señorita, mia, may we trouble thee for more water? Our pitcher lacks size, therefore must it go often to the well."

Morando drank eagerly, with the thirst of the wounded. Refreshed, he tried to move to a sitting posture. The padre gently restrained him.

"Not yet, my friend. A little more rest."

Morando again closed his eyes.

"I forgot to send you word to-day, padre," from the señorita.

"Word came, nevertheless, doña. My men cross-tracked the renegades in the hills above us and are now chasing them."

Stanislaus, regaining consciousness from a shock that would have broken the bones of an ordinary man, made an attempt for freedom. The friar's hand whirled him back.

"Estanislao, many unshriven souls have this day gone before God because of you. Have you no compunctions?"

The Indian glowered.

"Señorita, I will leave Captain Morando with you a few minutes, while I find men and improvise a litter. As for you, son of Belial," speaking to Stanislaus, "walk before me until I can get safe custody for you."

Padre Osuna drove the sulky renegade up the path.

Carmelita brought fresh water and bathed the wounded man's face. He lay very still. At last he opened his eyes.

"Carmelita, what are you doing here?"

"Never mind that till later."

"I went part way to Monterey with Señor Mendoza, then I returned to San José, where I received your message," he said in weak voice. "I could only bring a few volunteers, my soldiers having continued on with the señor."

"Please do not talk. You are not strong enough. The padre will soon bring assistance, and we will take you to my father's house."

He lay quiet once more. The girl thought he slept. Her smooth hands continued bathing his face.

"I didn't mean to offend you, Carmelita. I didn't know—of your engagement—to Don Abelardo."

"So you have heard that old story! Why, Alfredo, I have never been engaged to anyone."

His eyes opened wide. A faint flush spread over his pale cheeks.

"Never engaged—never engaged—you are not going to marry Peralta—not marry him?"

"No," she smiled.

CHAPTER XXIX

A DEPARTURE

"SEÑOR MENDOZA, there is no use to continue this parley. It does no good. I have possession of California. That possession I shall retain."

"The enlightened will of the people of this province must decide whether you retain possession, or relinquish it, Commodore Billings."

The two were standing within the fort, at a window. They were alone. The marines of the frigate United States and the sloop-of-war Cyane were drilling not far away. The soft, "plush, plush, plush" of their feet could be heard, following the staccato calls for maneuvers.

"I relinquish possession only when forced to do so."

"The proposal was made and accepted that your government hold Monterey tentatively."

"Never accepted by me. Our consideration of that question was broken up by Señor Zelaya sprinting in with news that Fairbanks's ships were passing south. The subject was not taken up again."

"But O'Donnell accepted it, Commodore. He has letters from Mr. Tyler, your President, countersigned by your Secretary of State, giving him full power to act for his government."

"Produce O'Donnell and his papers, Colonel Mendoza."

"O'Donnell started eastward at midnight, as you well know. Two months will scarce see his return."

"Señor Mendoza, I found the capital here without government of any kind; in other words, deserted."

"The absence of the people's servants, whether in fort or government house, does not make void that people's rights."

"I led my ships through peril of fog and night, to gain advantage of the British. Had they reached here before me, then, Señor Mendoza, this enlightened will of which you speak might go to Jericho."

"The British would have arrived here before you, as you are well aware, had not trading vessels, which I have under charter, at gravest risk drawn you away from certain wreck."

Billings raised his eyebrows.

"Commodore, in plain words, you are engaged in a piece of fillibustering. The United States is not back of such a movement as this."

The Commodore paced away savagely, then turned.

"Colonel Mendoza, possession is nine points of law, and I have possession. Demonstrate a better right than mine; and maintain it, if you can!"

The Spaniard, stooping, raised a heavy trapdoor. He threw it back. Iron-barred windows lighted a chamber beneath. Mounds of powder were heaped around everywhere.

"Commodore Billings, we are standing over the powder-magazine of this fort."

"So I perceive, Señor Mendoza."

The señor looked coolly at the other.

"Well, perceive this." From his pocket he drew a taper, used for lighting cigaritos, ignited it and held it up.

"Man, what are you about? Put out that fire!"

"Ah! Stand near—not too close. Now, look at that black sand."

Billings's mouth shut hard.

"In that sand, Commodore, there is power enough pent up to blow your marines to atoms, if I drop this tiny piece of flame. You and I—well, Commodore Billings, it is not necessary to consider ourselves."

Mendoza held the taper between thumb and forefinger. Two paces distant, across the aperture in the floor, the Commodore stood, his hand resting on a pistol which he did not draw.

"Shoot, Señor Billings," Mendoza said quietly, still holding the taper over the powder.

Billings's hand dropped from the pistol to his side.

"Then, cry aloud for help, my señor."

"Mendoza, what are you about?" hoarsely asked the Commodore. "What do you want?"

"That you leave Monterey."

Billings's teeth ground together. "Never!"

"Never?" glancing at the taper.

"It would not be the first house you have blown up."

"But it would be the last, my Commodore."

Mendoza seemed to grow in stature, to become colossal, terrible.

"This taper burns low. I have not another."

Billings's form relaxed.

"Your province is not worth a quarter thousand lives."

"So, you decide, Señor Billings. Well, open that window, then, and order your men to the ships."

"I shall not. What a diabolical advantage for you to take, Mendoza!"

"Nothing of the sort. I merely insist on the preservation of the rights of this province. You proclaim your intention of violating these rights, notwithstanding O'Donnell's pledged words."

The flame pointed its unsteady way higher.

"One minute more you have, Commodore Billings." Slowly Mendoza turned his hand. The taper slipped a little through his fingers. "Now, Señor Billings, or——"

The Commodore's voice shouted to his marines. His lips were framing a call for help.

The taper moved downward a little farther. "Commodore Billings, you thus cast the die? One—two—" a significant pause.

The Commodore's hollow voice ordered his men to the ships.

Mendoza extinguished the taper. In one hand he still held its end; in the other he meaningly grasped the flint. He did not speak.

Billings repeated his command, till every wondering marine had embarked.

Mendoza's peon riflemen filed into the castle; white gunners who had seen service in Manila, manned the cannon. The muzzle of the ordnance inclined until

their lips opened threateningly over the boats teetering in the surf. Three hundred sharpshooters, lent Mendoza by Captain Sutter, of New Helvetia, thickened in the auxiliary battery.

A salvo would be echoed by a thousand small arms.

Commodore Billings foresaw certain destruction in resistance.

As he was stepping into the last-departing boat Mendoza said to him:

"Because you came as conqueror we bid you go."

In an hour the harbor was empty, the flagpoles of square and castle bare.

CHAPTER XXX

ODDS AND ENDS

SEÑORA VALENTINO, rather pale, was sitting in the room adjoining the treasure-chamber of the old Spanish governor. Captain Farquharson was opposite.

"So you return to Europe to-morrow, Captain."

"Yes, señora, and glad am I to have the conveniences of a home-going war vessel. When do you go?"

"In a month or so—some time in the latter part of October."

"I regret I was able to give your brilliant work here such inefficient aid."

"My work here has been a brilliant failure," with a little laugh that was half a sigh.

"Señora, except for an altogether unforseeable combination of adverse circumstances California to-day would be English territory."

"Yes, if the wind had not blown; if the fog had not obscured, and if night had not come; or, to put it in different words, if Fairbanks had not been Fairbanks."

"The magnanimity of these squadron commanders is overpowering, Admiral Fairbanks having his equal in Commodore Billings. Why, the capital simply rolled

into Billings's hands. Then, he and Mendoza are seen in the castle holding some sort of a conference. The first thing we know, the castle is evacuated, and the Administrator of Mission San José is left cock of the walk."

"That is history as it is written, Captain."

"What do you mean?"

"O, nothing of any consequence. I was merely thinking aloud; that is all."

"My lady, I assure you I was standing at the old parade ground, an interested spectator of the exhibition of the manual of arms, when the occurrence of which I have spoken took place."

"My peon friend, Alberto, crept up under a window, within earshot of Commodore Billings and Señor Mendoza as they were having that little conference of theirs. What Alberto heard has cost him many a nightmare since."

"Señora, I'm in the dark."

"Well, well, Captain, in any case, it is a closed book to us now. Administrator Mendoza has gained advantage in the first throw. We'll leave England's cause in the hands of those whom the Home Office will send out. Who wins the game only the future will disclose."

"Many will miss you here, my lady."

"Crisostimo and my sister go with me, at least, as far as Spain. Our ship will round the Cape of Good Hope, not Cape Horn, as does yours. My brother-in-law, having sent in his resignation as official here to the government in Mexico, has sold his holdings in California to a company of which Señor Mendoza is president."

"Señora, I referred to the province at large. You have a cherished place in the hearts of many."

"It is a delight to be held in good estimation. I appreciate all the kind thoughts."

"As to the province in particular. On my way here I met Abelardo Peralta, in company with young Ysidro de la Barra and the half-'Boston,' Sam Watson. Don Abelardo was saying he had laid the Rancho San Antonio at your feet for the fifth time, and for the fifth time had found himself closing your door from the outside, a rejected suitor."

She smiled. "Abelardo is a dear boy, but very, very young."

"De la Barra and Watson each declared Morando stands between them and their happiness. They would challenge the Captain to a duel, and, dying spit by his rapier, they would leave their haciendas to you, in touching remembrance of their devotion. Paralta, on the contrary, rather scoffed, and said he would live, and see the soldier Captain leave your house biting his fingers in disappointment, as he himself had done."

The señora's pale face flushed. The toe of her slipper tapped the floor.

"I told them," the man not noticing, went on, jocularly, "that I had known many suitors in Europe leaving you disconsolate, but had never heard of any deaths therefrom. Whereupon they insisted that I too am your suitor. I told them I am too old and battered for such a beautiful young lady, besides having a cherished wife at home, a very good friend of the Señora

Valentino. The two again denounced Morando, declaring their certainty that the Captain would be the victor."

"You are much interested in romance, I see, Captain. Tell me that old story connected with your life in Dublin. You referred to it once, and aroused my interest. We were too busy then, but now we have a little leisure for diversion."

"Doubtless it would be to you a twice-told tale."

"Never mind, anyway, Captain. We all like to hear good stories, and especially from the lips of the actor himself."

"In the springtime of life sentiment bubbles up, and over, with the most of us. So was it with me.

"Soon after I received my commission as Captain our regiment was ordered to Dublin. A young recruit who had taken the queen's shilling was assigned to the grenadier company, my own. A veritable giant of a man he was, and had in him the making of a consummate soldier. Both of us saw light first on the bank of the lordly Shannon, I, in the hall, he, in a cottage of my father's estate. His parents still live in the old cottage.

"Well, the giant soldier-boy and I became almost chums. I had just come from several gay seasons that London gave us, and I felt pretty much at outs with the inanity of my own class. He was fresh and original, and I had known him from childhood. Of course he loved a girl. She was in domestic service, but as good as gold. I thought I was in love with her too. But, pshaw! she had more sense than I. Otherwise, we

might have married, and have been miserable for life. Still, she did seem a breath of heaven after the women of my own set."

"You forgot Lady Matilda," prompted the señora, laughing.

"My wife is one of God's good women, and I pray we shall be able to rear our little daughter to be like her. What I am relating occurred many years before I met Matilda."

"Good, my friend! And now for the rest of the tale!"

"A breach opened, and widened, between O'Donnell and me. She preferred him, you see, wherein she was wise.

"Then followed some words of mine for which I have always been sorry. I tried to make her believe he wasn't worthy of her, and all that. I didn't actually succeed, though she allowed him to think I did. I suppose at the time she really did half believe what I had insinuated.

"The young man stormed, pleaded, and raved. She seemed not to heed. One afternoon, on the parade ground, I rallied him harshly for some error in the drill which was really most immaterial. Then I sneered some beastly words at him. He clubbed his carbine and attacked me. I dodged and a glancing blow struck my shoulder and head. I was disabled for a year."

After a short wait, he went on:

"And I deserved what I received. By some miracle O'Donnell escaped capture. For some years he was in South America; then he came to California, went among the plains Indians east of here, and became a

mighty sachem among them. When he was in Washington, on some delegation for the Indians, he came under attention of high officials of the United States Government. No word need be said of his work here, señora," with a laugh.

"What of the peasant maid, Captain? You are forgetting her."

"She read of O'Donnell's activities, it seems; and learned of my presence here through the same source, the newspaper. The man-of-war lately from England, which brought news of my father's death, together with my accession to his title and estates, carried a letter to me from her, inclosing another to O'Donnell. I delivered his letter in person. I told him I am glad his old love is waiting for him, and promised when I get home to have all disability removed, so he can return and claim his bride. O'Donnell and I parted on the terms of our old-time friendship."

"Why did not the girl write direct to O'Donnell himself?"

"She was sure of my address, but not of his."

"I am more than glad that your story has such a happy ending."

"I had come on O'Donnell in the city plaza. We were sitting together in conversation when Mendoza walked up and greeted me with all possible cordiality, as a former comrade-in-arms. I found that the Administrator remembered me perfectly, and has kept track of me rather closely, the world over, considering distance and isolation."

"Did he know of your driving the powder wagons

through the blazing buildings at Waterloo, when the regular postilions had deserted their charge?" asked the señora, with a smile of admiration."

"Yes," modestly. "He was kind enough to speak of it. When we left each other, he told me whenever I return to California to make his house my own. I am glad that I met him."

A knock shook the door.

Colonel Barcelo was outside.

"Silvia," he said, "I may say you have shown yourself to be an unusual woman, a woman of knowledge and acumen quite remarkable for your years."

"Come in and be seated, Crisostimo. Here is my friend, Captain Farquharson."

"Ah, yes. Thank you for the chair. Good day, Captain Farquharson," this last stiffly. "Well, what I want to decide is, shall I issue a pardon for that low-down Indian, Stanislaus? Padre Osuna is now in the reception room waiting for my answer."

"Does the padre wish for this pardon?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It's this way. Padre Osuna has the fellow confined here in Monterey. You see," looking at Farquharson, "I'm still acting-governor, and shall be until notice accepting my resignation comes back from Mexico City. So, I can pardon or not, as I please. Do you understand?" glowering at the Captain.

"But why does the padre ask the pardon?" persisted the señora.

"O, well, he expects to make a good man out of him,

and then through him convert all those savages in the San Joaquin over whom Stanislaus has become a sort of king, since the death of Yoscolo."

"Surely Padre Osuna's judgment should be trusted in the matter, Crisostimo."

"Yes, yes. Exactly what has been in my mind all the time. I'll pardon the fellow. He told me the Señorita Mendoza has thrashed all the bad spirits out of him, and that Padre Osuna has beaten many good spirits into him—yes, I'll pardon the fellow. But there is one thing I never can forget, and that is the way that rascally Morando has treated me." He again glared at Farquharson, left the room and stamped down the corridor.

"It's Crisostimo's way," laughed the señora. "Captain, there is the question of the maps in this chamber, and those wonderful placer mines."

"Why not let Twickenham, our consul, take up the matter? He is entirely dependable."

"Very true, Captain; but there are many inquisitive eyes about. The working of the mine would mean that many may learn of its existence, and soon a deluge of Americanos come. Then, surely California would never be England's. Let our successors in the work do their part without undue handicap. In quieter times we will form a company, find the mines and work them."

"Señora, in Europe your hand will be busy in affairs of far greater interest to the world than the future of California."

"I shall never forget California, and the maps shall be safely kept till such time as we wish to use them."

"Now, dear lady, after long association comes the time for good-bys. It will be months, at least, before we meet again. Allow me to express my gratitude for the inspiration you have been to me in this California work."

"Captain, I thank you most cordially for what you say. When Lord Bevis Farquharson, with his wife, Lady Matilda, and their little daughter, Margaret, come to London remember that my establishment in Great Curzon Street is their home."

They clasped hands, their eyes dimming.

"My lady, do not forget that you have another home at Farquharson Court."

CHAPTER XXXI

ACROSS THE YEARS

NINE or ten friars, from different missions within a day's ride, were in a room close by the living apartment of the pastor, Padre Osuna, of Mission San José. Once or twice the padre's voice, in deep murmur, came to the ears of his waiting confreres; then it was silent. Each time the others paused a little, for his coming, then resumed desultory conversation.

"Why waits so long Padre Osuna for the coming?" impatiently from Padre Mercado, continuing: "We are told he is within, and even now once more I heard his voice."

Juan Antonio ushered in Señor Mendoza.

"Señors Padres, it is a delight to meet you. I trust your various charges are prospering."

The friars, who had arisen, exchanged glances.

"This is as may be, señor," from the padre of Santa Clara.

Padre Osuna came quietly into their midst.

"Reverend padres, and Señor Mendoza, I am late. A visitor, coming unexpectedly and bringing a message of vast purport to me, was the cause of my detaining. Let us be seated."

He continued:

"Brethren of my order, I requested you here, that you might be listeners of the proposal Señor Mendoza is prepared to make. You know the missions and their requirements. You may be able to enlighten him as to the wisest course. Now," inclining his head to Mendoza, "we are ready to hear you, señor."

The courtly hidalgo bowed in return.

"Señor pastor, and señors padres, the law of the secularization is spread on our statute books. Its extension in this Mission of San José de Guadalupe has been gradual, as you know. I believe the time has come for further extension."

He looked slowly from Osuna to the others. None of the churchmen spoke. He went on:

"Namely, that each able-bodied Indian of good character, member of this Mission, shall receive a plot of land of sufficient acreage to maintain himself and his family; the land, of course, to be taken from the leagues still held by this Mission, in trust, from the Mexican government."

Padre Osuna did not speak.

"The Indians are but overgrown children, and are incapable of caring for themselves, except under strict tutelage. So said the great missionary, Padre Junipero Serra, and the years have shown the wisdom of his thought." Thus, Padre Suscol, of Sonoma.

"Years ago I gave each of my Indians his piece of land. They are working it for themselves, and ably. Padre Junipero spoke of the issue as he knew it sixty years ago, and most wise were his words, but he could not foresee present-day needs," was Mendoza's reply.

"The procedure that you propose will impoverish the Mission," remonstrated another friar.

"Many of the hacenderos are giving each year a tithe to the Mission. Let the Indians be instructed to do the same, either in money or in labor," rejoined Mendoza.

Osuna lifted his eyes. "Why load this burden on our neophytes?"

"To teach them the necessity of self-reliance. They should become of age, as regards development of mind."

"Their old teachers should determine that," from Padre Mercado.

"The state determines when our sons and daughters attain their majority, not we," from Mendoza.

"Why oppress our neophyte children with this becoming of age just at this time?" questioned Osuna.

"Because it is not a day too soon. Men of many nations begin to flock here. Westward the course of civilization must come. It is destiny. We cannot stay it. Then, why not meet it? We, Spaniard and Indian, must stand on our own feet, accept from the newcomer what will strengthen our moral and spiritual fiber, and give back as much of ourselves as will benefit others. Therefore must we be self-reliant."

The room was still.

Padre Osuna spoke after a moment.

"Circumstances have but now arisen which preclude me from giving Señor Mendoza reply. That, as well as the adjustment of other affairs here, will have to fall to some one else. Soon will I make explanation." Turn-

ing to Mendoza: "Shall I find the Señor Mendoza at his house late this afternoon?"

Mendoza bowed. "At your service, señor padre."

"Brethren, I will return to you in a moment."

The padre conducted the Administrator down a long corridor, into the courtyard, toward the lodge.

An elderly woman was walking under a vine-covered trellis.

"Mother," tenderly from the friar, "I am sorry to keep you waiting; but there are many things to do, and only a short time."

The snowy-haired woman had advanced a few steps to meet her son. She stopped abruptly. She was not looking at the padre, but at Señor Mendoza.

"My mother, allow me to present to you—" began the friar.

"The Lady Romalda!" exclaimed Mendoza, the words clutching his throat.

"Don José!" she cried, holding out her hands, her lips trembling.

Señor Mendoza took her hands in his, and, bending low, reverently kissed the finger-tips. "Romalda! Romalda!"

The padre looked at the two in questioning wonder. The woman and the man seemed to have slipped the years from their shoulders, and to be standing again in youth.

"My boy," said the mother, "Colonel Mendoza and I knew each other well, many years ago. We were very dear—friends," moisture dimming her eyes, emotion halting her voice.

The son was much shaken by his mother's show of feeling. "My beloved mother!" he said, gently stroking her hair.

In a little Señor Mendoza and the Lady Romalda, after the manner of those long separated, began speaking of former times. Soon the padre excused himself, to return to his brethren, leaving his mother and Señor Mendoza seated under the trellised vines.

Nothing but kindliness and tenderness and chivalry was in Mendoza's heart for the woman by his side. Memories long forgotten came to life, under stimulation of the Lady Romalda's presence. Robbed of all harshness were those bygone times. The happy and useful life he had spent in his adopted country left bitterness no room.

As for her, slumbering years and crowding vicissitude had put in the background, but had not quenched, the affection for her girlhood lover.

The years passed under review.

They spoke of the parting in the castle of her father, the Ambassador Altamira, of Castile.

"Colonel," she said, a faint blush creeping into her faded cheek, "had I listened one moment more to you that day, I would have fled to your arms, and have left with you for California, though my father's heart had broken."

A surprised exclamation was Mendoza's reply.

"You rode furiously down the avenue. At the bend, in the shadow of those old oaks, you stopped, reining your horse about. I can still see you there. I hastened to the door to welcome you, thinking you were about to

return. My father bade me within, but I obeyed not. I remained at the door. I beckoned you. My father made a scene. Nevertheless, once more I beckoned. I thought you saw, but you galloped away."

"I saw you not. Grief flooded my eyes. Castle Altamira, your home, and hallowed by our courtship, had been to me as a shrine.

"On this Pacific shore I had built another Castle Altamira, laying the foundation and rearing the walls in love. It embodied my devotion to you. In the shadow of those oaks, as I rode away, my heart was gone from me, for the castle in Castile was become but building stone, the doña of the hearth mine no longer. The new home in this western world, lacking the cement of love, was worthless, and must fall in ruins. Had I seen you beckoning—" agitation breaking the sentence.

"You would have returned, José?"

"Yes, Lady Romalda, yes; though many forbidding ambassador-fathers barred the way," smiling. "But, señora, your father's intensity of feeling seemed equaled by your own."

"The hidalgo is by nature an ardent nationalist, as you know. Born into that atmosphere, with every breath I imbibed its spirit. That you should lose this pride of nation fired me with indignation. Yes, José, even when love forced me to try to bring you back, my very soul was lifted against you. Time, and the irony of fate, revolutionized my views."

They became silent, their thoughts busy.

"I too became a foreigner," she went on presently, as if no break had occurred in the conversation.

She related her journeying to Bombay with her father, a few years later, and of meeting there a young native prince who was in part of Portuguese extraction, his mother having been a member of a powerful family of that nationality residing in Goa.

The prince's father, a Christian, had been maharajah of Rajput, one of the great principalities of British Hindustan. The Mohammedan portion of the maharajahship had engendered rebellion. In attempting to suppress it by armed force the father was killed. The son, also a Christian, attained high position in English officialdom in Bombay.

This youthful Hindustanee, whose Latin name was Lusciano Osuna do Castello Branco, became very friendly with the daughter of the Spanish representative, Ambassador Altamira, of Castile.

"My father died suddenly," said the Lady Romalda. "The prince paid court and won my hand. We were married.

"My husband was a citizen of Great Britain. I became a British subject by my marriage. My son, known here as Padre Lusciano Osuna, was born in Bombay, and was given his father's name in baptism, Lusciano Osuna do Castello Branco."

She told of her son's school days in England, whither the English government had sent him, of his graduation from a military academy, and his return to India.

"The Mohammedan maharajah was deposed by the British. My husband was placed on the throne. I lived in Rajput, a princess. My husband fell in suppressing insurrection, as had his father before him. Lusciano,

my son, commanded in his father's stead, and through his efforts the rebellion was overcome. Great preparations were under way to honor the young prince, the present padre, when he should take the throne. Great Britain promised him unlimited support. His father's enemies, even, swore allegiance to him. All looked forward to a reign of prosperity and peace.

"Lusciano, always of strongly religious bent, refused the honor; turned his back on the world and became a Franciscan novice in Goa. The people begged him to remain with the principality, but he persisted in his chosen course. Soon he was called to Europe. In a few years all Spain was ringing in praise of the brilliant preaching of the friar do Castello Branco. His superiors, foreseeing a future of great usefulness for the churchman, were about to make him a cardinal. The mystic, the recluse, in him took alarm, and he requested the British ambassador at Madrid to use his influence to avert the threatened honor. He was allowed to come to this province, and hoped the world would forget him.

"Grave difficulties have recently arisen in India, which is seething in rebellion. The people of Rajput, remembering his efficient leadership, are clamoring for the return of Prince do Castello Branco. The English premier brought the matter before the pope, who has issued an order that my son go to Rajput at once, ascend the throne, and, as friar-king, rule for Christian concord in the principality. The British ship bearing the order to Lusciano stopped at Bombay and I took passage to meet my son and to see the country which was to have been my home.

"So, José, I came—and I find you, an unlooked-for pleasure. I was told that you had obliterated the house you had prepared for me, so I thought that long ago you had left this part of the world forever."

Mendoza shook his head slowly, and was lost in reverie. At last he spoke. "My heart overflows with rejoicing at this privilege of hearing your voice once more, and of taking your hand in mine. Time touches you lightly, Romalda."

"And you, also, my Don José, of the erect shoulders and stalwart form."

There under the arbor, with the busy life of the Mission going on about them, they talked until the long shades came.

It was not until Padre Osuna stood by their side and said, "Madre mia, the twilight must chill thee after the warmth of Rajput," that they parted.

Matronas attended the mother, while the friar conducted Mendoza to the lodge gate.

"Señor," he said, "I have advised my brethren to resist secularization by every means within their power. Were it possible for me to remain as head of this Mission I would fight, to the last, the proposed encroachment."

The neighboring hacenderos vied among themselves to do honor to the Princess do Castello Branco, guest of the province. The days came and went in delightful companionship.

Finally, the time for the homeward journey had arrived. The British ship was sailing out of San Francisco harbor, on the afternoon tide.

Lady Romalda and Señor Mendoza were standing on the forward deck, looking out over the vast, restless sea. She was talking rapidly. He spoke little.

The vessel began pitching on the swells that precede the bar.

It was the moment of parting.

They stood, hands clasped. The lady's eyes were streaming. The Administrator's good-by broke in his voice.

A boat was lowered over the side, and Señor Mendoza was rowed to the fort.

The ship gathered headway, crossed the bar, and lost itself in the horizon of the ocean.

CHAPTER XXXII

A WEDDING

MERRILY rang the chimes in the old belfry of the Mission church of San José de Guadalupe. "Come! Come! Come! Come, Come!" the call sounded far out into the valley shimmering in the green of springtide.

"Come! Come! Come! Come, Come!" echoed the hills.

Pigeons, denizens of the church tower, flew in, and out, and around, the whirring of their wings sounding above the resonance of the bells, in the intervals of their summoning notes. Flocks darted into the air, circled for a moment, then disappeared, as if bearing away urgent messages. Others dropped from emptiness, clung to the gargoyles on the belfry corners, and, in low cooings, told some story.

"We are coming! coming! coming!" came in refrain from many footbeats. Men and women from throughout the entire province were gathering on the eastern slope of Santa Clara Valley that bright spring morning.

The Vallejos, of the North, came; their ladies were there, and their sons and their daughters, personifications of the intellect, the valor, the virtue and the beauty which glorified the valley of the Moon Gold and silver bespangled their horses' bridles, hung as pendants

from the bridlereins, inlaid the stirrups, and gilded the saddles from high pommel in the front to long anquera reaching back to crupper.

Gold lace adorned the hatbands and decorated the ponchos of the men, while gold spurs clicked at their heels. Silk and satin embellished señoritas beautiful and señoras handsome. Peons and peonas, jigging after their masters on horses clean-limbed and swift, were bravely attired as for a fiesta.

The Picos rode in from the South, with retinue as splendid as that of their Sonoma rivals, their Gallic heritage showing in the harmony and luxuriousness of color in poncho and gowning.

José Antonio Carillo escorted representatives of his family along the Camino Real, through San José pueblo, on to San José Mission, four leagues away toward the setting sun.

The Bandinis followed the de la Guerras. The Auguellos and the Malarins paced side by side. The busy bee of politics buzzed in vain in the cap of Juan de Bautista Alvarado, for the active brain beneath was under the spell of superior attraction in Mission San José, and the man hastened thither faster than if the governor's chair awaited him there.

Señor Castro, the steadfast, flanked his friend Señor Alvarado, and looked about complacently, contentment complete, since his equipment equaled any present.

The "Bostons," allied to the Spanish families, were there, as Latin in dress and manner as the Spaniards themselves.

"Come! Come! Come, Come!" the bell kept saying.

"Come, to the nuptials of the Señorita Carmelita Mendoza and the Señor Alfredo Morando."

Mission San José lay nestling in verdure. The vineyards pointed their budding tendrils low, their gentler tints soft against the darker leaves of the olive groves.

Orange orchards rioted in magnificence on the sunny slopes. The tree foliage, shot through with the waxy petals of next year's promise, half hid the golden balls of this year's harvest still awaiting the gathering hand.

Almond trees, as yet showing never a leaf, were beclouded by their snowy flowerings into vast pillars.

Gentle breezes rose and fell. Soft blossom-showers whitened the ground, eddied around parent tree-trunk, or crept to modest hiding place amidst the grass-blades.

Everywhere the odor of growing things loaded the air with sweet messages. Myriad flower-breaths floated through open doors and windows, dropping fragrant tribute in hacienda house and cloistered corridor.

People in throngs, eager with expectancy, held the street fronting on the Mendoza hacienda house. Masters of ceremony opened a wide lane from mansion to church. The Spanish gentry fringed either side; detachments of soldiers, in serried rank, stood next; back of them, overflowing to the very limits of the village, crowded other residents of the valley.

The deep-throated organ within the church began to voice its monologue. The conversation of hidalgos fell to whisper; the chatter of peons and peonas hushed.

The great gate of the courtyard swung open wide. Through the archway, on a palfrey white as milk, came the daughter of the de la Mendoza. Her mount, true

to the strain of his forebears in far-away Arabia, caracoled to and fro, and ambled forward slowly, step by step, as if to show the perfection that California could breed in priceless horseflesh. His mane flowed into the trappings on his breast; his streaming tail almost touched the ground.

Carmelita, gowned in white, rode stately, as became the princess that she well might be. The wreath of orange bloom clinging above her forehead would have made a fitting diadem. The folds of her bridal robe fell entrancingly about her. With eyes cast down, cheeks aglow, she passed along, the fairest bride Santa Clara Valley ever saw; no small claim, indeed, for hers was a time and she of a race wherefrom beautiful women sprang in plenty.

Here bridesmaids followed in double file, their horses white, every one; their apparel, the delicate pink of the first flush of dawn, the result of skillful needlewomen through many a day.

Lolita Hernandez, pretty and piquant, was side by side with Lucinda Higuera, demure and handsome. Alfreda Castro, with raven hair showing beneath her satin head-covering, moved along with Tula Laynez, gray-eyed, blonde-cheeked, and saucy as a sparrow. Palmita Peralta, with cherry lips ever smiling, was paired with Leopolda Estudillo, of the starry eyes.

The bride has reached the church steps.

Deftly her feet disengage themselves from the silken loops used for stirrup; nimbly she reaches ground. Quickly the following señoritas are at her side, while peon grooms lead away the horses.

"Viva! Viva! The Señorita Mendoza! Viva! Viva!"

Then from some one: "Viva! the Señorita doña's bridesmaids!"

"Ah! Ah! Look!" cried many.

Morando, on coal-black steed, came through the gate and slowly to the church door. Comandante of all California he was now, promotion from guardian of pueblo San José to post commander at Yerba Buena having been succeded by transfer to Monterey presidio; and, finally, came the command of all the land forces.

With him rode, as groomsmen, the presidio commanders of Yerba Buena, of Monterey, of Santa Barbara, and of San Diego, and accompanied by many caballeros.

Señor Mendoza, now Governor Mendoza, was horsed on old Mercurio falling into years, still peerless for speed in all the valley. Flanked by members of his council and the junta departmental the Governor made his way up to the church. With sweeping gesture of his bridle-rein, to the right and to the left, he gave salute for salute to the waiting grandees, as he passed along.

Up the aisle, decorated with innumerable Castilian roses intertwined with ivy, came Carmelita, on her father's arm, orange blossoms clustered in her hand, her bridesmaids well in the lead.

The organ swelled in notes of rejoicing.

Directly before the señorita went two little girls, clad in white, backing slowly altarward, as she advanced. Freshly gathered rose-petals, handful by handful, they showered before her, making a pathway sweetly yielding as she trod.

Captain Morando, awaiting his bride, stood at the altar gate, in uniform, his poncho laid aside, his brother officers attending him.

Bride and groom knelt within the sanctuary.

Neophyte Indian acolytes swung censers. Incense hung in the air, tingling the nostrils with its Oriental perfume, while the many candles glowed through the maze like burnished spear-points.

As the clergy solemnly intoned the nuptial service, the choir, a hundred strong, of Indian men and women touchingly gave back its responses. The melody of Pepita's voice flooded nave and chancel, love for her mistress the inspiration.

An instant's pause. Every breath stilled.

With hands upraised over bride and groom stood the officiating padre. "Whom, therefore, God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

Down the aisle husband and wife led bridesmaid and groomsman, governor, council, and junta departmental.

Muskets crashed, as they crossed the street; the multitude shouted congratulations; the hills above them lived in medley of reiterated acclaimings of good will.

At the wedding breakfast words dripped like honey from the mouth of Señor Alvarado, as he spoke of the lovely bride. Grave Castro smiled approbation; the clever Carillo applauded; his ally, Don Pio Pico, cried aloud, "Bon! Bon! Buena!" Even Alvarado's saturnine enemy, the half-Sicilian, Di Vestro, clapped his hands, as the señor, the honey-drip becoming torrential eloquence, said: "For the kiss of such a bride as the Señora Morando, gladly would I again drive that Mexi-

can usurper, Micheltorena, from California soil; yes, and every follower he has!"

"Will you! Will you!" exclaimed the young wife, blushing at mention of the new name. Stepping up, she kissed squarely the Señor Alvarado, her mother's brother.

"A challenge! A challenge!" from the guests. "The former governor at last has found a nut he cannot crack. Aha! Alvarado, thy kinswoman is ever quicker in retort than thou."

The tall politician bowed gently to the Señora Doña Carmelita.

"If you draw them hither, mi querida, no power of mine could budge them a single inch."

"Well said! Well said!"

Later came the afternoon barbecue in the foothills. Dozens of beeves were roasting in deep pits, on live-coals, the outdoor sports of early California first whetting the appetite for the feast.

Bonfire blazed red against crag and forest that night, as peon and peona continued the repast, and danced the fandango to the music of guitar, and the surprised cries of catamount and wolf.

At the hacienda house the Señor and Señora Morando danced in the contra danza amidst the plaudits of the lookers-on.

Señor Mendoza, threescore and ten and one, led forth the lithe Francesca Sanchez, and never youth tripped a lighter step than did the governor of California at his daughter's wedding.

Pio Pico, gallant and graceful, placed his hat on a

señorita's head, and they followed Mendoza and his partner.

Alvarado and Castro, Pedro Zelaya and Abelardo Peralta found ladies and joined; so did de la Barra, and Higuera, Salvador Vallejo and Nazario Dominguez, until, as some said, California north, and south, and center, was united, if only for the contra danza.

Small hours found the gaiety undiminished, for midnight supper strengthened for further dancing. Neither was one day deemed sufficient to do adequate honor to the marriage of Carmelita Mendoza and Comandante Morando.

Next day the couple, the Governor Mendoza, and all friends repaired to the hacienda house of Fulgencio Higuera, two leagues away, to dance and to make merry till the break of another morning.

The third day was passed with Señor Berryessa, near pueblo San José, the following at Marco Calderon's, and so on.

The seventh day found them entering the porte cochere of their own home, once the residence of Colonel Barcelo, from whose gates, ere many moons, they were to see, with rejoicing hearts, the Stars and Stripes burst, in unending vigil, over government house, plaza and castle.

Long years, and happy ones, they lived, and their descendants, now of the third and fourth generation, bless their memory, and tell of the honor, the bravery, the virtue of General Morando and his bride of Mission San José.

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